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ABSTRACT

The ideas collected in this 18th book of "Ideas Plus" come from two sources: ideas submitted at an Idea Exchange session at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) annual convention or spring conference; and contributions by readers of "Classroom Notes Plus" and "Ideas Plus." Some of the teaching practices described in the book are innovative and surprising; others are adaptations on familiar ideas. The book is divided into three broad sections: (1) Prewriting and Writing (11 ideas); (2) Literature (16 ideas); and (3) Explorations (13 ideas). (NKA)

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BOOK 18

PRACTICAL CLASSROOM IDEAS BY TEACHERS FOR TEACHERS

IDEAS Plus

A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas

Book Eighteen

National Council of Teachers of English
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Foreword

Ideas Plus and its quarterly companion *Classroom Notes Plus* are the principal benefits of NCTE Plus membership.

The ideas collected in this eighteenth edition of *Ideas Plus* come from two sources: ideas submitted at an Idea Exchange session at an NCTE Annual Convention or Spring Conference, and contributions by readers of *Classroom Notes Plus* and *Ideas Plus.*

Some of the teaching practices described here are innovative and surprising; others are adaptations on familiar ideas. Your own ingenuity will doubtless come in handy as you customize these approaches for your students.

Feel free to send us a teaching practice of your own to share with NCTE Plus members. Submissions for consideration may be mailed to *Ideas Plus/Classroom Notes Plus,* 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096; or sent by e-mail to notesplus@ncte.org.

Note: Many of the e-mail contributions in this issue are reprinted from NCTE-talk, an electronic discussion group sponsored by NCTE. (Web addresses recommended were valid at the time this volume went to press.) To read interesting discussions on a variety of topics related to secondary teaching, visit the NCTE-talk Archives at http://www.ncte.org/lists/ncte-talk/archives.shtml or click on Site Map from the NCTE home page (www.ncte.org) and choose NCTE-talk Archives.

1 Prewriting and Writing

Preparing our students to be effective communicators in the world outside the classroom is a challenging task. In this chapter students are presented with an array of writing assignments to help them learn to express their thoughts in clear, concise language. These teaching ideas and activities promote students' use of specific detail in essay writing, the selection of vivid words and unique phrases in descriptive writing, and the recall of sights, sounds, and feelings from a time in their past. All are designed to boost students' confidence in their writing.

Getting It Write

As an English teacher at the high school and college levels, I found that writing is often met with resistance from all concerned. Teachers recognize that writing assignments require time invested in response and feedback; students recognize that writing means emotional risk in finding ideas and presenting them to an audience for feedback. But there are ways to minimize the struggle by combining the best of two methods: collaboration and direct teaching.

This activity begins with the concept that we are here to work together: student and teacher alike. It is English that combines the best of process writing and teacher guidance. It's a writing workshop consisting of portfolios that are developed and revised until the student is either satisfied or aware of the remaining work that must still be done. There are no grades until much later, so students learn that skills have value in and of themselves.

The classroom arrangement is tables that seat four to six students, facilitating interaction. The teacher moves around the classroom, working with individuals or groups, joining in when appropriate. Traditional

teaching is brief, with student sharing maximized. Each lesson, be it thesis, parallel structure, or outlining, is demonstrated by students following a model in classroom writing.

For example, the concept of "show, don't tell" is advanced through a lesson that demonstrates the use of specific detail in essay writing. Students are first presented with a topic sentence, such as "She is very athletic." Each student in a group adds one sentence (aloud) that might be a characteristic of "being very athletic." One student might begin by saying, "She jogs every morning." The next student adds, "She plays a lot of different sports." Another might say, "She beats her brother in arm wrestling."

The teacher then interjects, how does one show "being athletic"? What is the body language that indicates this? How does "being athletic" look? Can one paint a word picture of it? Students again have a chance to offer suggestions that show rather than tell: "She moves gracefully"; "She has a long, smooth stride"; "Her whole body seems to glow with energy."

Now we are ready to move on to stage two: the written portion of the lesson. One person, chosen at random, writes a topic sentence atop a sheet of paper that generalizes a behavior. Here are some sample topic sentences:

- I knew my friend was angry the moment I looked at her because she . . .
- My boyfriend let me know he was feeling sentimental when he . . .
- The strange dog demonstrated that he wanted to kill us when he . . .

Person one then passes this sheet on to the next person, who adds a developmental sentence that continues the paragraph. (Students will need a little time to write their sentences, so those who are waiting can read or work on other assignments until it is their turn.)

Stage three has students reading the paragraphs aloud and making general commentary. Should the sequence be changed? Is chronological order a better choice? Should we move from least important to most important? Can certain phrasings be improved? Can the reader now *see* what we mean?

The final stage is the writing assignment: students are to write a short essay that *shows*. The writing is begun in class with feedback from classmates but completed at home. This generally fills a 40- or 50-minute class session but can be varied as needed.

Reading the work of the other group members makes students less timid and less self-conscious about their writing, for they see that their own ability is at about the same level as anyone else's. After a few weeks of this kind of collaboration, students have achieved more than new friendships. They have also acquired new writing skills, have seen value in communication, and have overcome the common fear of the blank page.

Beth Staas, West Chicago, Illinois

Scar Stories

I adapted this teaching idea from G. Lynn Nelson's *Writing and Being* (Innisfree Press, 1994). The activity is a writing exploration that can be used to introduce personal narratives, nonfiction, or any number of writing pieces. I use it at the beginning of the year and find that students draw from it all year long for all kinds of projects.

Ask students to get out their journals. First, have them put down their pencils for three minutes to "reflect about their body and the injuries or wounds it has received" (p. 109). After three minutes, ask students to draw a simple figure—a stick person or the outline of a person.

Tell students to mark places on their drawing where they have received injuries or wounds. Explain that sometimes these wounds are so deep they leave scars as a reminder. Students should annotate scars by describing how each one was received, their feelings about the injury, or just anything they remember.

Most students will have many stories to tell and will be eager to share with classmates. I usually allow 10 minutes to annotate scars silently; then I stop students and ask them to share with a partner the story behind one or two scars. Students have 2 minutes each to relay their stories.

At this point, students can launch into drafting a narrative or other personal writing by choosing one scar story that needs to be told. Another idea that works well with some nonfiction writing is for the class to discuss the range of emotions that occur from the point of injury to the physical healing. For example, they might have experienced shock, pain, anger, or embarrassment, depending on the severity of the wound. Students readily identify with these universal feelings, which are often seen in nonfiction writing (or in any other type of writing, for that matter).

As another adaptation, some time after exploring physical scars, which are mostly "safe" for students to share, I ask them to draw a large heart in their journals. Then, I give them a few minutes to reflect on emotional scars or wounds. I ask students to annotate heart scars on their drawings, emphasizing that often these stories are more difficult to tell and hurt more deeply than physical wounds. I always share a personal example to set the tone.

Again, students can share a story with a group or partners, or they can begin writing. Later, when students claim they have nothing to write about, I often direct them back to these drawings, which they keep in their journals.

This exploration encourages students to tell their stories and helps them realize they have stories to tell. I have many students who come back to tell me that they remember this writing activity and that they still have their drawings and their stories.

Sue Weems, Payson High School, Payson, Arizona

Blow Darts and Elephant Guns

I took this idea from the online discussion group NCTE-Talk. After my students have read some stories, identified what they like about good stories, and started writing stories of their own, we work with word choice and the idea of showing, not telling. Instead of these terms, which are in themselves "telling" words, we use the terms *blow darts* and *elephant guns*.

I begin by having volunteers explain what a blow dart does (used with a very specific target; can be deadly with little effort). Then volunteers explain what an elephant gun does (used with a large target;

can be deadly with high effort). These two tools can both get the job done, but the blow dart can be much more effective. I explain that in writing, we can think of a blow dart as very precise language that nails the emotion, action, and object. It creates a vivid picture in the reader's mind without much effort from the reader. An elephant gun in writing is a general description that requires the reader to work to understand what the author is trying to say.

Next, using the overhead, we go through sample sentences such as the following:

1. She lifted her arms, idly pulled her liquid dark hair out of the elastic, and then made the ponytail again, more tightly.
2. Tommy went back into the boxing ring for the third time in spite of the fact that he was scared.
3. The horse skittered past Rawlins sideways, Blevins clinging to the animal's mane and snatching at his hat.
4. The voice within him said to find the girl, wherever she was hidden, and finish her.
5. I jumped out of bed, went upstairs, took a shower, got dressed, and ate breakfast.
6. "What a jerk!" Sandy said as she walked away from the policeman.
7. You could see people poised nervously, waiting as tensely as if Mr. Birkway were going to announce someone's execution.
8. Carmen rose from the table, upsetting the plates.
9. "Oh, really!" She wedged as much contempt as possible into her tone.
10. And still the wind made confusing howls into their ears, and it was hard to think.

Students identify the descriptive blow darts and elephant guns and explain the reasons for their choices. If they argue with you or one another about the samples, all the better. Typical decisions are as follows: 1. BD 2. EG 3. BD 4. EG 5. EG 6. EG 7. BD 8. EG 9. BD 10. BD

After that, out come the markers and the stories that students have been writing. They trade papers with a partner, read through one another's stories, and circle the blow darts (phrases or words that bring precise images to mind). Then they write *blow dart* at the top of the page to identify the color of marker used for these descriptions. They

then trade papers or pens and use a different color of marker to identify the elephant guns. During this time I go around the room and help students who are still unsure on the concept or who are having trouble identifying these elements in their partner's writing.

Students return the papers to the writers, and we discuss what we are striving to create: vivid word choice and unique phrases that help the reader understand our thoughts. At this point students return to revising their stories and are able to incorporate precise descriptive words. I have found that they can grasp what is meant by the concepts of blow darts and elephant guns and can identify them in peer editing and when reading published works.

Donna L. Davis, Kiowa, Colorado

The Tortilla Chip Assignment

This is an elaborate and humorous variation on a descriptive writing assignment. In this exercise, students learn and apply correct business-letter format, practice writing paragraphs, and write descriptively.

I begin by distributing copies of the *Alerts Newsletter* to my students.

Alerts Newsletter—Contaminated Chip Crisis

News has been received of an incident of contamination at the local tortilla chip factory. Any individual who has consumed a tortilla chip in the last twelve months will lose all memory of those twelve months.

Dr. M. Smith of Antidotes Unlimited has produced an antidote that, if taken in time, will allow the patient to retain the memories from two days of the last year.

This antidote is in very limited supply. In order to prevent a stampede at the factory, Dr. Smith and staff will review written requests and select those persons worthy of the antidote.

All those who wish to apply for a portion of the antidote should write to:

Dr. M. Smith
Antidotes Unlimited

Virginia Mason Hospital
200 Mercer
Seattle, WA 98105

Students read the newsletter silently and then discuss it. After we laugh about the idea for a moment, I give students the following instructions for writing their letter of application for the "antidote."

Act Now—Antidote Is Limited

Write your letter, in correct business-letter format, to Dr. Smith at the address above.

Your letter should include an opening paragraph in which you capture the reader's attention and state the purpose of your letter.

The body of your letter should describe the two days you want to remember. Capture the sights, sounds, and feelings of each day. Use vivid detail and imagery to convince your audience that you deserve to retain the memory of these days. Be persuasive!

Choose days that are memorable to you. They don't have to be the most fun, or the best days, but they should be days you can describe in minute, precise detail.

In your closing paragraph, restate your case in a new way. Make your letter stand out.

You should prepare a planning sheet that includes ideas and brainstorming, a rough draft, an edited version, and a final polished version.

You may use your usual classroom procedures for writing assignments. In my class, I include the following components:

- Model and teach prewriting with a planning web using an example of my own.
- Model and teach the rough draft and revision steps; illustrate "show, don't tell" with an example.
- Go over the format of a business letter and provide an example.

After students have written letters I provide them with a peer-edit worksheet and ask them to edit their papers in pairs.

I collect the edited papers and cover the names with correction tape.

I redistribute papers to a different class section (this could also be done with different student groups within one class).

This new group is now the "Panel of Experts" assembled by Antidotes Unlimited to review the letters. I borrow a lab coat from a friend and play the role of Dr. Smith for the day. We review the following criteria for selection:

- Does this letter make sense? (organization)
- Is there enough information and detail to tell an interesting story? (ideas and content)
- Does it sound natural when read aloud? (sentence fluency)
- Did the writer show instead of tell? (word choice)
- Does it seem as if the writer really cares about the days selected? (voice)

Working in small groups, students review four or five papers and talk about which letters best satisfy the requirements and why. (I find that it is best to have the peer process take place before I have responded to papers, so that my comments do not influence the outcome.)

Next, students from each group have a chance to read aloud portions of the one or two best letters they reviewed (anonymously, since the papers do not include names at this point), and the class discusses what makes these letters effective.

On the day papers are returned, I bring out several large bottles of sparkling cider or juice with specially prepared labels reading "Sotirod: For Restoration of Lost Memories." We all share a toast to celebrate the restoration of our lost memories.

Maeta Kaplan, Corvallis Middle School, Corvallis, Montana

Windows on Writing

I have used this prewriting activity with students of all ages and abilities, and they always love it. I enjoy it, too, for it gets them focusing on details. I can't give proper credit for the activity, but several years ago I attended a workshop in which it was used.

Pick a piece of literature that has at least two strong characters. Brainstorm with students about the possibilities of windows looking into that particular story. Have students envision a window suitable for that time period and setting. Be sure it is an actual window—some choices such as "window to your mind" or "a submarine window" would not work for this particular assignment. After the students have done the prewriting, they can move on to different kinds of writing: short story, descriptive piece, drama, and other appropriate formats.

Repeat the following guidelines to students to lead them through the activity. Go slowly enough that students have time to think and write:

1. You are inside and looking through that window. Now describe the weather. Give a lot of details so that a reader can really feel what you are seeing.
2. In the distance you can see a person coming toward you. As this person gets closer and closer, you are able to see more details. Is that person walking? Riding on or in something? Describe what you see.
3. Now you are able to see that the person is wearing a head cover ing. Describe it.
4. The person seems to be carrying something. What is it?
5. As the person draws nearer, you can now see how that person is dressed. Describe what you see.
6. What expression do you see on that person's face?
7. If you have not done so already, give the person's name.
8. Just before that person reaches the place where you are, a second person appears and joins the first person. Go through the same process and describe the new person.
9. Who are you and why are you at this window watching?
10. Go through the same description process about yourself.
11. As you walk out to greet the two people, what is the first thing you say?
12. How do the two people respond?

I have used this activity for creative writing, and students are amazed at the results. I always have many students willing to share their stories.

Karen Teusink, South High School, Springfield, Ohio

Traffic Stoppers

Looking for an activity that gets your students out of their chairs and enthused about writing? Try Traffic Stoppers, a simple, creative drama activity that gets students focusing on voice, point of view, and oral communication.

First, write out a list of various characters representing a cross-section of American culture. For example, I might list taxi driver, waitress, mechanic, doctor, teacher, aging movie star, young tennis professional, and race car driver. Each student randomly selects a character—perhaps by drawing the names out of a hat. Students then divide into small groups of three or four and act out having a traffic "fender bender," with each student portraying his or her selected character.

This simple activity can be altered as needed. You'll find students are asking for this activity throughout the year.

If time permits, students might write scripts for their encounters. This way, the role-playing serves as prewriting. Then students can exchange their scripts with other groups for response. The original groups can then consider the responses and make any revisions they desire.

An added twist is to trade the polished scripts among the different classes doing the assignment. Groups can then study, rehearse, and perform the scripts written by other classes.

Lori Atkins Goodson, Wamego Middle School, Wamego, Kansas

Promises, Promises

This is a writing invitation designed to get kids started. The National Writing Project calls this type of classroom practice "front loading." Research indicates students need a great deal of time thinking before they ever begin drafting. Writing invitations are designed to help students focus and organize ideas. This stage of the writing process is where the bulk of the learning takes place. Any time you can help students "front load," whether it is in science, reading, math, social studies, or any other area, you will be greatly assisting them in making meaning. And if students are not making meaning, they are not learning.

There are 10 steps to this activity:

1. Students begin the activity by writing down their definition of the word *promise*. Give them about a minute to do this or however much time you think is appropriate for their age level.
2. Students share their definitions with the people who sit around them.
3. Ask for volunteers to share their definitions of *promise* with the whole class. You may want to write the definitions on the board or on the overhead. Then discuss the definitions with the class. What are the common elements in the definitions?
4. Ask students to agree on a common working definition. This probably will not be very difficult since there will be some overlap in the students' definitions.
5. Next, ask students to write a list of promises they think people should keep. They may indicate categories of promises or specific promises. You may want to guide them toward a certain focus here, or you may simply let students create a list and work from there.
6. Have students share their lists with the people who sit around them.
7. Allow time for students to share their lists with the entire class by asking for volunteers to read lists aloud. Again, you may want to write these on the board or overhead.
8. Now ask students to make a list of promises they have made but not kept. Ask them to list at least five promises. You may need to guide students through this step. It might help to take time to discuss what a promise looks like. Do we promise things through our actions? Through some unspoken agreement we make with friends or parents? Through our participation in a community? In a family? What about responsibilities? Homework? Chores? Obligations? Help them realize there are many ways to make a promise.
9. Ask for volunteers to share their lists with students who sit near them and then with the entire class. Give students the freedom not to share these lists. Some broken promises may be too personal for students to reveal to others.
10. Conclude the activity by asking students to make a list of promises they intend to keep. Ask them to try to come up with at least 10 promises. Again have students share with their peers and with the entire class.

Nancy G. Patterson, Portland Middle School, Portland, Michigan

Take the Risk with Student-Selected Topics

With my Houghton Mifflin tablet in one hand and my Scholastic ballpoint pen gripped securely in the other, I scribbled my way through a full day of note-taking during the fall Louisiana Council of Teachers of English meeting. As I sat through several stimulating sessions, I jotted down the following notes concerning listening and speaking:

- Students retain 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, and 70% of what they say
- During 8 of every 10 minutes we are awake, we are communicating with others; we write 9% of the time, read 16% of the time, speak 30% of the time, and listen 45% of the time

Each of our speakers seemed to stress the importance of incorporating into our classroom instruction the communication elements of listening and speaking. With the enthusiastic dialogue of Tommy Boley ringing in my ears, I realized that many of the things I'd been doing with my students' research papers did indeed incorporate speaking and listening skills.

At our school, students are required to do a research paper each year, from the 6th grade through the 12th. At the 9th-grade level, papers are coordinated with the science department, and at the 11th grade, they are written with the American history classes. Before last year, the emphasis of research papers done by my 10th-grade students had always been on Shakespeare—his life, themes, plays, and other topics I felt were important.

Last year I decided to take the "risk" of allowing students to select their own topics—topics in which they had a genuine interest. One or two students were even allowed to pursue in more depth topics done during their freshman year.

Topics did indeed cover a large range of ideas, from the effects of being the middle child to the psychological effects of the use of color. In most cases, students were successful in selecting topics about which they really wanted to know more.

The process used in writing these papers was not unlike the "traditional" one. What was different was that each student was required to

use materials from a minimum of two interviews. The steps used were arranged in a chronological manner as follows:

1. Students selected their topics and narrowed their focus to one main topic idea after individual thought and discussions with peers.
2. Students prepared a preliminary bibliography of sources to consult.
3. Students began their research and prepared note cards from four different sources.
4. Students did more research and made more note cards.
5. Students formulated their interview questions and then conducted their interviews.
6. Students did more research and prepared more note cards.
7. Students completed a formal outline of their papers; each outline was evaluated by peers and the teacher.
8. Students wrote a rough draft (or drafts) of their papers; each draft was evaluated by peers and the teacher.
9. Students revised their papers and prepared a final copy, including a bibliography. I also asked them to add a page listing the 10 most interesting things they learned in doing the research. These interesting facts did not have to deal with just their selected topic; they could include anything learned about doing research.
10. Once the research paper was completed, the final step was for each student to give a 5- to 10-minute oral presentation telling the class about the interesting elements in their research and responding to questions from other class members. These sessions generally provided some lively discussions.

Each step in this process was thoroughly explained before the students began their research, and all steps were evaluated via self-evaluations, peer group suggestions, and teacher comments.

Although the students' interviews were the most important element in the researching and writing of the paper, they ended up being the most casually and ineffectively done aspect of the students' research papers. This year I plan to discuss the following procedures and to encourage their use in the interviewing process:

1. Students must have a genuine curiosity about their subjects; otherwise, their interviews are doomed from the beginning.

2. Students are to prepare a list of questions based on the information gathered in their initial research; this list should include "ice-breaker" questions, logical, fact-finding questions, probing questions that ask things the student really wants to know, and perhaps some hypothetical, "what-if" questions.
3. Students should keep the following points in mind when conducting the interviews:
   a. They should be punctual and not extend the interview past set or reasonable time limits.
   b. They should realize that all questions on the prepared list need not be asked if the interview takes on alternate, more interesting directions.
   c. They should listen carefully to what the person is saying and not be concerned with what the next question will be or what the person being interviewed might think of them.
   d. If students wish to use a tape recorder, they should first obtain the subject's permission and then should place the recorder to one side so that it does not disrupt their eye contact with the person being interviewed. The recorder can be set on zero when the interview begins, and notes may be taken concerning physical reactions of the subject at various points of the interview, with the student noting the number on the recorder.
4. After the interview students should go over their notes as soon as possible and make note cards from the most informative part of the interview.

I look forward to using this approach to the research paper again this year. Not only did these papers provide me with interesting new insights, but they also presented students with challenges not faced in previous research projects and with situations that were often emotional and gratifying, such as one Jewish student's interview with a local resident who survived the Holocaust.

This approach to the research paper demanded communication skills in writing, speaking, and listening. I trust that those inspirational speakers from the convention I attended would agree.

Barbara Freiberg, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Thank-You Essay

I have used this idea with freshmen and sophomores, and I believe it could be adapted for middle school students. It helps students develop writing skills and also makes connections to important people in their lives.

First I read a copy of a personal essay titled "Thank You" written by Alex Haley. I found a copy in an old literature text, but it was first published in the newspaper supplement *Parade Magazine* on November 21, 1982. In this essay Haley thanks three important people who significantly contributed to his life. He gives reasons and explains the importance of thanking those around us. (If you aren't able to find a copy of this essay, you might simply begin by talking about several important people who have significantly contributed to your own life and then suggest some reasons for thanking those around us.)

Next I ask students to think of three people who have affected their lives and to bring those names to class the following day. On that day, I explain to students that they will be writing short essays in which they describe the three people they want to thank and explain why they are thanking these individuals. I tell students that they may write their essays in the first person, and I suggest that they keep in mind the need for good transitions between paragraphs. I also ask them to think up meaningful titles for their thank-you pieces.

I allow students class time to brainstorm reasons and supporting evidence. I suggest that as they plan their concluding paragraph, they consider these questions:

- What have these three people contributed to you?
- What type of person have they helped you to become?
- What have they taught you about life?

Another class period is dedicated to writing the rough draft. Once the rough drafts have been collected, I use excerpts from student essays to demonstrate good examples of introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions, transitions, and any other concepts we are working on at the time.

Student volunteers share their finished writings with the class, and we talk about some of the similarities between various students' reasons for thanking people. It's also valuable to hear students talk about the lessons that friends and relatives have taught them about life. Some of these writings are very heartfelt, and many students share them with those important people in their lives.

Jody Morton, Canal Winchester High School, Canal Winchester, Ohio

TEACHER TALK:

The Art of Persuasion

Can anyone suggest examples of persuasive essays I can show my students?

A persuasive essay that I use and have success with is "The Trouble with Television" by Robert MacNeil of MacNeil/Lehrer fame. The piece appears in the Prentice Hall Copper series. I team that with "Primal Screen" by Ellen Goodman, which appears in the ninth-grade McDougal Littel series. Both essays deal with the dangers of television. I have students first analyze both essays and then compare them. Finally, I ask students to write a paper where they decide which essay is more persuasive and why.

I often include reading the picture book *The Wretched Stone* by Chris Van Allsburg. In this book the wretched stone can be interpreted as a symbol of a television. I have used the book alone when doing a lesson on symbolism, and the combination of all three works is interesting.

Marcie Belgard
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FOCUS ON WRITING

Opening Windows

by Jim Speakman

We want to teach writing to students with something they want to write about, something so important that they will expend extraordinary effort to get it clear in their own minds and for their readers. Richard Wilbur describes one such writer in his poem "The Writer":

> In her room at the prow of the house
> Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,
> My daughter is writing a story.
> I pause in the stairwell, hearing
> From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys
>
> Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.
>
> Young as she is, the stuff
> Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it too heavy:
> I wish her a lucky passage.
>
> But now it is she who pauses,
> As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.
> A stillness greatens, in which
>
> The whole house seems to be thinking.
> And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor
> Of strokes, and again is silent.

Wilbur's persona may not be the ideal writing teacher, but he knows something about writing that we can all use: it comes from within, and the teacher interferes with the process to the peril of the writer. His metaphor of the starling trapped in the room, who can only get out safely if the persona opens the window, makes clear what he thinks of an outsider's intrusion into the writing process. Trying to capture the starling, Wilbur's persona implies, might lead to injury and death. Intrusion uninvited into the writing process is potentially destructive.

Too many high-school English teachers seem to have little respect for writers, either those whom they teach or those who write the literature teachers assign. If they had respect, they would not be imposing upon the former writing formulae that are never evident in the latter.

Much of the writing I see taught in middle- and high-school is formulaic. Students are not encouraged to realize some purpose they own, inchoate as it might be, but instead to satisfy arbitrary and rigidly enforced rules of structure. Such reductionism leads to absurd formulae, having no more to do with writing than painting by numbers or assembling jigsaw puzzles has with visual artistry.

Consequently, the teaching of writing degenerates into an imposition upon students of various prompts: telling students what to write, what conclusions to draw, and what forms to use. ("Write a five-paragraph essay showing the progress of Henry Fleming's feelings about war and heroism in *The Red Badge of Courage*. Begin with an introduction that ends with a thesis sentence that identifies three different stages of his attitude. Paragraph 2 needs to show his attitude before he ever goes to war. Paragraph 3 needs to show his attitude after he has fled battle in fear and before he returns to his regiment. Paragraph 4 needs to show his attitude at the end of the novel. End with a conclusion that summarizes the progress of Henry's attitudes toward war throughout the novel from hero to coward to mature understanding of his own limitations.")

The teacher's role, having described and perhaps modeled the form, having stated the requirements in a prompt, is to read drafts, make marginal and end-comments, grade finished essays, justify the grade with more marginal and end comments.

I have taught writing that way.

I do no longer for several reasons.

Reason 1: I cannot in good conscience urge my students to write in ways that can never help them become good writers. Consider such essays as E. B. White's "Once More to the Lake" or "The Ring of Time," Loren Eiseley's "The Brown Wasps" or "The Birds and the Machine," Alice Walker's "Beauty, When the Other Dancer is the Self," Franklin Russell's "The Running Eiders," Wallace Stegner's "The Town Dump": no five-paragraph essay with thesis and topic sentences here.

Reason 2: It presumes that form is more important than function, a presumption that flies in the face of most language use. Except in the English classroom we use language to influence people, to change their minds or keep them on our side: from trying to persuade Mom and Dad to let us use the car to trying to be elected President of the United States. Too many teachers of formulaic writing want students to write comparison/contrast essays, not because comparison influences a reader to choose A over B in a value system that matters, but simply to demonstrate a dexterity in writing about the similarities and differences of any two things.

Reason 3: It promotes destructive uniformity at the expense of constructive diversity, telling students that what is important in writing is not what they have to say but how well they fill in the blanks of the formula. It "dumbs down" writing, encouraging students to fill in the blanks of the formula with mindless, vacuous, easy drivel, not to grapple with the important and difficult writing during which students might

> Batter against the brilliance, drop like glove
> To the hard floor, or the desk-top
>
> And wait then, humped and bloody,
> For the wits to try it again. . .

I have tried an alternative, have used it for at least six years now, and like it more than ever.

There are no formulae. Writing as I tell my students, attempts to influence the reader in ways that, if the writer is successful, will make the world a better place. It needn't be earth-shaking in its import. One can write about one's grandfather, influencing the reader to admire and respect and emulate his qualities of character. One can write about one's visit to Hawaii. To encourage the reader to go, the writer must make Hawaii attractive, persuade the reader that he will enjoy going to Hawaii, be happier, a nicer person to be around, and make the world just a little bit better thereby. (Conversely, the purpose might be to discourage the reader from going to Hawaii to avoid the problems the writer describes. People who avoid problems, generally speaking, are happier than those who suffer them; thus the world is a marginally happier place.)

I teach writing to class-size groups by using models of good and not-so-good student writing and good non-student writing. I invite students to discuss the models, out of which discussion students discover the purposes and rhetorical strategies.

Then I say to them, "Write an essay."

I usually give my students three weeks to write an out-of-class essay, and when I receive the final draft, I score it without comments.

However, between the assignment of the essay and the due date, in those three weeks, I encourage them to write drafts, as many as they can. I use two incentives, one of which is important to me, one of which is important to them (to some of them anyway).

My first incentive is my promise that if they submit a preliminary draft, I will respond at my word-processor, suggesting more effective rhetorical choices to promote their writing purpose. I staple to their draft a print-out of what I have written (I do not write on student drafts).

The second incentive is extra-credit points (equal to 4% of the total possible number of points) each time they revise a draft making a conscientious effort to incorporate into their writing the suggestions I make.

I like that practice. For one thing I do not require drafts, so mostly I receive them from students who at least want to improve their scores.

I like it because it allows me to apply my skills as a writing teacher in the writing process, not after its conclusion. I write usually half-a-page, sometimes one to two pages commenting on each draft.

I like that practice because it allows me to focus on what is important. First I look for the writer's purpose; when I can't see purpose or see it only vaguely in a welter of apparently unrelated detail, I try to suggest rhetorical strategies (what to add, what to omit) to make purpose clearer. My comments on a paper are never exhaustive. They address the principal problem of each draft; when that problem is solved, I attend to other problems in subsequent drafts.

I like it because it allows me in good conscience not to make those superficial, *pro forma* comments in the margins or at the end of the graded essay, trying to justify a grade despite ample evidence that such comments are a waste of time. From draft to finished essay I see the influence of my editorial skills.

Although I do not comment on the finished essay, I will discuss my scoring of a student's paper at a mutually convenient time, but I em-

phasize that the best time to obtain the benefit of my expertise is in the writing process, not after it is over. Parents seldom object that I do not comment on final drafts. They dare not, knowing that their child had ample opportunity to receive more feedback on one draft of one essay in my class than she is likely to get on all the essays she writes over the course of a semester in the class of the teacher whose comments consist of "Good job," or "Weak conclusion," or "no topic sentence," or "lack of specific support."

I like my method because it allows me to honor the writing process as a means to influence others, using experiences that have influenced us.

I like it because it makes grading papers easier. Seeing two or three drafts of an essay, I develop a good idea of what the score will be before I even read the final draft. And not having to comment on final drafts, I read a class set much faster than I ever did when I had to squeeze into the margin my application of the wisdom of Demosthenes.

I like it because it helps me to learn how to teach writing by looking at each draft not as round enough or square enough to fit the round or square hole of the formula but as an attempt by heart and mind to try to influence me somehow to share values. That is authentic writing. With each draft that I read I struggle to discover what the experience about which the student writes means to her and try to find ways to help her use that experience to influence others to make the world a better place. That struggle bears fruit in attempt after attempt to articulate suggestions for shaping the text (adding, subtracting, explaining why one choice is better than another). The more I read and respond to drafts, the more I discover what makes good writing and how to convey my discoveries to my students.

I doubt that I spend less time reading papers than my colleagues. I spend 10–15 minutes per draft, sometimes more with a particularly thorny problem. But I feel much better about the quality of that time than I ever felt grading and commenting in the margins, on the back, at the end of each final draft.

For those who might argue that the new teacher needs formulae, I say "Nonsense." Teaching writing is a learning process for teacher more than for student. New teachers need to learn best how, not restrict how, students can write what they need to say. The formula-bound will have a tough time learning to recognize good writ-

ing or write it and a tough time learning how to encourage good writing in students. A teacher who looks at student and non-student writing to discover strategies which work (or fail) will discover how to encourage students to incorporate successful strategies into their own writing.

Like the persona in Wilbur's poem, I do not burst into the writer's space. I encourage the writer to share with me and consider my experience with writing. I like to think I am opening windows through which my students may someday "clear the sill of the world."

Jim Speakman teaches high school English in Sacramento, California.

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2 LITERATURE

Literature makes it possible to travel to different regions of the world, to go beyond our planet to other universes, and to experience life in the past or in the future.

Reading is important for us, and we hope to make it a significant activity in the lives of our students. The teaching ideas in this chapter get students reading and responding to what they read.

In these activities students discover the pleasures of poetry, make connections between music and literary works, experience the contrasting pattern of lightness and darkness in *Beowulf,* and start a *Brave New World* chatline. In addition there are classroom strategies for *The Catcher in the Rye,* "Porphyria's Lover," *Cry, the Beloved Country,* and *The House on Mango Street.*

Poetry Responses

The nature of poetry has always been problematic or mysterious, leading poets, readers, critics, and scholars to fashion their own solutions and definitions. Emily Dickinson wrote, "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is poetry." "Poetry is a composition of words set to music," said Ezra Pound. Alberto Rios wrote that "poems show us what's right in front of us—in a way that surprises and engages." In addition, Yvor Winters wrote, "A poem is a statement in language about a human experience." The essence of poetry remains elusive and open to a range of definitions.

"Our goal this year," I tell my students, "is not to remove the mystery of poetry; instead, our goal is for you to discover the pleasures and values of poetry even if, or even though, poetry itself is inexpli-

cable." Students *approach,* or "come nearer to," poetry in two ways. They study poetry through a formal or structured study in class, and they also study poetry informally through poetry responses. The goal of both methods is for students to "come nearer to" poetry.

Each week students choose one poem from a list of poems I give them and write a response to that poem. The response should be typed and be one page in length. The responses are due at the beginning of class each Monday—no exceptions.

What do students write for a poetry response? They have several options: an analysis of the poem, relating what they think is the theme; an examination of the theme; a narration of a personal experience, relating the poem to themselves. What they write is up to them as long as they say something besides how they have no idea what a particular poem is about. I hand out sample responses to give them some ideas.

Their assignment is to read all the poems from the list every week. Although students respond to only one poem each week, they should become familiar with each of the poems on the list. Here are some guidelines I give them for reading poetry:

- Remember to listen to the poem.
- Read slowly. Take your time. A poem isn't meant for speed-reading any more than you would speed-listen to your favorite CD.
- Read straight through the first time, getting a feel for the poem without worrying about what you do not know.
- Read the poem several times, just as you listen to a song several times, getting to know it, feeling the life within it, each time discovering something new in it.
- Notice the title. Titles are not labels. They can sometimes offer an entry point, can be a part of the poem. They can set a tone or atmosphere, create a tension, even interact with the poem itself.
- Work through the sentences, if the poem uses them, to get the subjects, verbs, objects, and other elements straight.
- Read the poem aloud at least once. Because sounds and rhythms are crucial parts of poetry, it helps to hear poems, not just "say them in your mind." Sometimes the sounds and rhythms bring out aspects you will not notice in silent reading. You'll be enticed to slow down,

and you may feel the words and rhythms, even the life in the poem, in your mouth and ears.

This idea is from an AP workshop taught by Sondra Daye.

Kim R. Barnes, Montgomery County High School, Mt. Sterling, Kentucky

A Song Project for *The Catcher in the Rye*

J. D. Salinger titled his novel as an allusion to "Comin' Thro' the Rye," a poem by Robert Burns. Passages at several places in the novel refer to or offer variations on the title. Passages from the poem may be compared to the novel.

Since this novel deals with many themes that are common to adolescence and dealing with life in general, it is only logical to expect to find modern songs or poems that could also be compared to this novel.

After we have read and discussed *The Catcher in the Rye*, I make these same points to my students and tell them that we will be looking for modern songs and poems that seem to have themes and elements in common with the book *The Catcher in the Rye*. Here are the instructions I give for this assignment:

Student Assignment

1. Find a song or poem whose title could also function as an alternative title for *The Catcher in the Rye* and whose subject matter or content is comparable to the novel. Only one person may use a particular song or poem, so turn your choice in as soon as you can in order to reserve your selection.
2. Turn in a copy of the lyrics or words to me in advance so that I can make an overhead transparency for showing in class.
3. Write an oral report in which you compare the content, theme, and lines from your selection to the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. Choose passages from the novel to back up your position. If possible, also provide evidence that the title of the song or poem you chose could also be the title for the novel. Your report should be well organized and should clearly set out the comparisons you

are making between the theme of the song or poem and the theme of the novel.

4. On the day of your presentation, bring in a cassette or CD that includes your song to play to the class, or read your chosen poem to the class. (The teacher provides the CD/cassette player.) Your total presentation, including playing the song or reading the poem, should take from five to eight minutes, so you will need to practice and time your presentation once or twice as homework.
5. If you like, you may also create a visual aid—a poster, computer picture, mobile, or other kind of artwork—that reflects your new title and the points you make in your oral report.

Your project will be evaluated on these criteria:

- meeting the deadline for the project
- meeting the requirements for the project
- using creativity in your selection and presentation and in your optional visual aid
- your attention to the basic requirements for public speaking: familiarity with material, preparation, eye contact, limited notes (3" by 5" cards are preferable), keeping within the set time limits

This activity always grabs students' attention and is an effective way to spark discussion about and comparisons among the themes in *The Catcher in the Rye*, contemporary poems, and the songs that students listen to everyday.

Cheryl Peterson, Harriton High School, Rosemont, Pennsylvania

Sensitizing Students to Themes in *Beowulf*

For several years I used classroom discussion and the blackboard to teach the alternating patterns of joy/sorrow, celebration/despair, light/darkness, and civilization/violence that make up *Beowulf*. Success was mixed. Some students saw the point; some did not.

By changing the location where the class meets and using a simple

visual tool, I found a way to ensure that all of my students became sensitive to these patterns.

On a discussion day after reading *Beowulf,* I arranged for my students to meet in a large windowless conference room, chosen precisely because it was windowless. (If it's not convenient for your class to meet in a windowless room, you might try closing the blinds of your classroom ahead of time or even enlisting the help of a colleague in hanging some sheets or fabric samples over the windows. The darker you can make the room, the better.)

With the room in total darkness, I asked the class to imagine what the world around them would have been like in about A.D. 800. I asked why the power of darkness would have been so much greater for those first listening to *Beowulf* than for us as we read it.

The class and I then reviewed in sequence the incidents in *Beowulf.* Each time the forces of civilization and order or joy or celebration seemed to be triumphing, I lit the single candle before me, the only source of illumination in the room.

Each time an incident revealed the advance of sorrow or darkness or the crumbling of civilization, I blew out the candle.

Then, with the lights on, we reconstructed the pattern of lightness and darkness and discussed how it was related to the themes and the outlook in *Beowulf.*

This device was simple, and I mocked myself in the class for using it. In follow-up writings and discussion, however, every student showed increased insight into the themes of *Beowulf.*

Harry E. Cole, University of Mobile, Mobile, Alabama

Brave New World Chatline

After our students finished reading Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* we turned the Macintosh writing lab into a chatline simulation. Before class, we switched keyboards at islands of computers so that each student would be word processing to a monitor visible only to another student.

In the classroom we told students they were headed to the lab to carry on a dialogue about *Brave New World* in a simulated chatline.

Students drew for partners, pairing up with such labels as Colour and Scent Organ, Feelies, 16 Sexophonists, and Westminster Abbey Cabaret. The pairs of students then seated themselves at the two computers marked with their "place cards." Before they could begin, they had to instruct their partner where to move the mouse to launch ClarisWorks; this was an unforeseen but amusing complication. So excited were they at this point about the activity that no one complained, and within just a few minutes they were ready to go.

When both partners had opened a new word-processing file, the chat could begin. One student was assigned to support the World State and the other to oppose it. We recommended they decide on some code to signal the end of a comment, such as an ellipsis, an asterisk, or a bracket. There were three rules: *Polite keyboard language only. No oral communication once the chat was in progress. Putdowns were allowed only in the context of the novel.*

Once all the bugs in the activity had been worked out, students had about 20 minutes to chat. We were amazed how well they stayed glued to their seats, not jumping up to look at the screen where their own messages appeared. Occasionally, however, they did have to ask their partners what they had just typed. Throughout, there were smiles on all 26 faces, and we were praised for our ingeniousness.

As students chatted, they teased each other about loving to fly, not having a mother, and wearing zippyjamas. Although there was some talk about sex ("Everybody belongs to everyone else"), they did get into discussions about importance of family, dependence on drugs, veneration of Ford, and moral education. We required students to print out and staple their dialogues. Later we compiled and shared some of the best lines so they could see each other's efforts.

The dialogues demonstrated not only that all the students had read the novel but also that they had enjoyed the reading. Even more important, we were able to see how they grappled with the novel's controversial themes and made some connections to their own world. This was "edutainment" at its best.

Deanna Hebbert (teacher) and Jennifer Child (student teacher), Skyline High School, Longmont, Colorado

Post-Reading Response Activities

Here's a list of response activities I use with my students after we read a novel. These are general enough that they can help students think more deeply and make connections with the themes and characters in just about any work of fiction. The activities serve as good jumping-off points for more lengthy writing assignments.

1. After reading the novel, which of the following best describes how you feel: angry, awed, amazed, baffled, disgusted, disturbed, dissatisfied, irritated, joyous, uneasy, untouched, sad? Elaborate on your answer.
2. Complete any four of the following statements with a minimum of three additional sentences each, reacting to what you have read.
    a. If I were in this story, I would/wouldn't have . . .
    b. I really admire the character of _____ because . . .
    c. I realized . . .
    d. I can't really understand . . .
    e. I did/didn't like the way . . .
    f. The character of _____ reminds me of myself when . . .
    g. I know the feeling of . . .
    h. I began to think of . . .
    b. The *biggest* thing that the character of _____ learned in this story was . . .
    c. The *most* important lesson that I, the reader, learned in this story was . . .
4. Which of the following descriptive terms makes you think of one of the characters in the story or novel we just read: lonely, angry, helpless, uncaring, helpful, wise, responsible, unselfish? Describe the character and explain why you think this character feels or personifies this emotion.

Dodie Zolman, Grandville High School, Grandville, Michigan

Four Strategies for *The House on Mango Street*

Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* is widely studied at the middle school level. In conjunction with reading and discussing the book, the following strategies offer innovative ways to increase students' comprehension and help them move from the reading to thinking and writing about their own lives.

Readers' Theatre

I had been having a difficult time with some of the chapters in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. My eighth graders were finding the sentence structure and creative use of punctuation a deterrent to their comprehension. Finally, I happened upon a solution that I have used not only for this novel but also in other novels we have read.

I assign several students parts in the novel. One student (or the teacher) takes the role of narrator. Sometimes the class can take the role of narrator. The students then read the lines of dialogue as the character (that is, assuming the voice and mannerisms of the character and leaving off the "he said," "she said").

Sometimes, if the chapter is particularly difficult, I point out to the student when it is his or her turn to read. In that way the class is able to hear the chapter in dialogue without distracting pauses.

This method has also helped me involve more reticent students. Students are more likely to read in class if they can adopt a persona. Also, they enjoy speaking the lines of the character, and they do so with great gusto. This corrects the "curse" of the monotonous, monotone reading in class.

Lynda M. Ware, Shaker Junior High School, Latham, New York

Writing Our Own Vignettes

I use this assignment with our study of *The House on Mango Street*. Before we begin reading, I introduce students to the concept of *vignettes*, short narratives written with careful attention to economy and word choice. I explain that after we finish reading the novel we will be writing our own vignettes about our lives. This helps students to keep an eye out for the special characteristics of a vignette as they read.

After the reading is completed, I distribute a handout containing the following guidelines:

Guidelines

The House on Mango Street, by Sandra Cisneros, is a collection of vignettes about a young Latina girl. The vignettes give you a picture of her struggles, victories, family, friends, school, neighborhood, and so on.

Now that we have completed the reading, we are going to create our own vignette collection.

Your collection will deal with your life and must include at least 15 vignettes with titles. Your collection should have an overall title and should be displayed creatively. You also need a table of contents for your collection.

You need to use the creative writing skills we have looked at while reading *The House on Mango Street.* For example, consider using metaphors, similes, and vivid images.

Also think about the design of your piece. You might include photographs, borders, artwork or pictures cut from magazines, colored paper, or other visual decorations.

You are not required to have each of the above mentioned things, and you are not limited to them. Use your own imagination.

Begin by brainstorming a list of ideas of topics for your vignettes. You might think of vivid experiences or people in your life who mean a lot to you. Your collection may cover a brief period of time in your life or your entire life. Plan your final vignette in such a way that it brings a sense of closure to the entire collection. If you like, tell of future goals as Esperanza does in *The House on Mango Street.*

Jolene Gensheimer, Snoqualmie, Washington

Suggested Writing Activities

Sandra Cisneros's words provide a wonderful venue for teaching figurative language. Additionally, modeling her words allows students to begin the process of developing their own style.

Below are listed several vignettes from *The House on Mango Street* and suggested writing activities to accompany them.

- "Hairs"

  Describe another part of your body: eyes, ears, nose, etc.

  Describe the sounds and smells of comfort.

- "Boys and Girls"

  Discuss how boys and girls are different or similar.

  Describe your responsibility for younger siblings.

  Describe siblings as friends.

  Explain the idea of a best friend and why you need one.

- "My Name"

  Describe what your name means to you.

  Discuss nicknames, welcomed or unwelcomed.

  Discuss your namesake: Are you named for someone? What does your name mean?

  Discuss the pronunciation or mispronunciation of your name.

  Consider what you might rename yourself, if you could, and why.

- "Cathy Queen of Cats"

  Describe your neighbors.

  Describe how you feel when your friends move away.

  Write about your own pets.

  Write about friends who brag or about snobby people.

Colleen Arey, Breck School, Minneapolis, Minnesota

A Personal Memoir Project

I use the following assignment with *The House on Mango Street*. It helps students think about themes from the novel as well as think about people and stories from their own lives.

I give students a handout with the following guidelines:

Guidelines

In *The House on Mango Street*, the narrator creates a scrapbook of her life and her neighborhood by including "snapshots" of characters she has known, pictures of places she has visited, memories that are important or interesting to her, and other bits and pieces of her life.

This is a special project unlike any other you have done in class this year. You will be putting together a folder that represents the entire work you will do on this novel. As a response to this novel, each of you is going to create your own personal memoir, using the style that Cisneros employs in her book. Instead of telling the story of your life from birth to now, in chronological order, you will create your own scrapbook that tells the story of who you are, where you live, and what makes you the incredibly unique person you are.

Your memoir must include the following items:

- A cover page decorated to reflect your unique personality (on the front of the folder or as the first sheet).
- A table of contents with page numbers for each item.
- Four entries (typed, if possible), with titles, three-fourths to one page in length. Choose your entries from the list below. (Try to use the same style as Cisneros uses in her vignettes).

  Family Story—How did I come to this town? to this country? What is my heritage? How does my ethnicity fit into American life? How did my parents meet?

  Life Mapping Story—You are writing about a particular event, person, or feeling at a specific point in your life. Your story should not be about your entire life, but rather a specific point in your life. Remember, the key is to be specific! The more concrete images you can get on paper, the better.

  Your Name—Write a story about how you got a name, why you like or dislike your name. Tell how your parents chose your name. Explain the meaning of your name. Refer to Cisneros's piece if you get stuck.

  Icon Story—Think or make a list of images from your past (an old car, a ticket stub from a dance, a baby blanket, a gift, etc.) and associate these images with an event or feeling. Write a story explaining that feeling or showing what happened. Why is this thing so important in your life? (Your childhood memory piece would be of good use here.)

  A Memorable Friend—This story should focus on one of your friends. The friend can be from your past or present. Make this person come alive in your memoirs using a strong writing voice.

A Place I Have Lived—This should be a house, apartment, or other dwelling you have lived in during your life. You must describe it in vivid detail so that the reader can picture it in his or her own head. Tell a story that happened there. Why did you choose this place? What is important about it?

Your choice: please have your idea approved by the teacher.

- Your favorite vignette from *The House on Mango Street*, written in poem format. It should be one that you relate to strongly. Also write a brief paragraph on why you relate to it.

Create a layout for your memoir in which you incorporate images into the text. Think of your memoir as if it is a magazine about you. Watch for errors in spelling, usage, or language mechanics. Neatness does count!

Keep all rough drafts and notes in the back pocket of your folder, neatly organized. Keep all handouts and worksheets in the front. These parts will be graded separately, but they must be included in the folder.

Vince Cowdry, Carrollton, Texas

Language with a Beat

In this activity, students are motivated to appreciate structure and language through the use of music. This activity can be a refreshing supplement to a poetry, novel, or short story unit. Students discuss and explore songs that relate to the theme or mood of a particular literary work; in so doing, they come to a deeper understanding of and connection with current readings.

Students are given the opportunity to choose songs from various musical categories and rhythms that appeal to them and that fit a suggested literary work or theme. They are welcome to suggest favorite songs by their favorite groups, but only if the lyrics are easily available and appropriate for the classroom.

At least five songs are selected for small-group work. The chosen

songs are typed and photocopied, and each group receives copies of the lyrics of one song.

The students then examine and discuss the song's words and meaning. They talk about which words and phrases they like best, which best create a mood or image, which are most effective at conveying the song's meaning, and how the song's meaning and mood relate to the literary work or theme. They also talk about what the artist is trying to say, how well he or she says it, and whether students identify with this message.

As students talk about the connections between the song and the particular literary work or theme, you might ask them whether they can think of other songs and literary works that share the same themes or moods. This can lead naturally into an open discussion and comparison between various themes and topics in current songs and in poems, stories, or novels. Finally, students can be asked to write paragraphs on what this particular song means to them.

Many times, working closely with songs allows students to achieve inspiration and write their own, original songs. It also allows the class and individual students to show off their singing talents.

This activity has proven to be very worthwhile and enjoyable for the students and the teacher. It helps students value language study, points up connections between the themes of literary works and popular songs, and enriches their creative capacities.

Vilma Cordova-Lopez, Caguas, Puerto Rico

Introducing Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

I try to contextualize John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* for my students with several days of discussion, music, and visual aids. Here are some of the ways I do this with my freshmen.

We spend two days on 1930s history and an introduction to Steinbeck; on the third day we start reading *Of Mice and Men.* At the beginning of each class throughout the Steinbeck unit, I play music from the 1930s: Billie Holiday, Louie Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Fats Waller, Bing Crosby. (The following Web site has actual recordings from the 1930s: http:\\www.dismuke.simplenet.com/.)

Day One

I begin the Steinbeck unit with a short discussion about why people immigrate to this country. We explore the idea that most people come with some sense of purpose (such as freedom to practice religion, freedom of speech, escaping oppression or suffering). We can call this the idea of the "American Dream." I encourage students to talk about what people in the 1930s might have considered important and how they might have defined the American Dream (such as owning land, freedom from wars).

Once the students grasp the concept of the American Dream, I ask them to respond to a journal prompt about their own idea of the American Dream. What does it mean for them? How might their dream differ from that of people in the 1930s? I ask students to discuss answers when they are finished writing.

I begin a discussion about life in the 1920s prior to the day the stock market crashed. We discuss how the country changed after that happened, and how the public's American Dream changed during the Great Depression. I briefly mention Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt and their roles in the depression. I show a film clip of the bread lines and soup kitchens that resulted from the new class of poor people in the depression era. Another impressive film clip to show (Time Life's series "America Looks Back" is great for this) displays FDR's inaugural speech of 1933 and the footage of his cabinet working through the night when he was inaugurated. (FDR opted not to attend the inaugural ball and instead stayed up all night drafting legislation as part of the New Deal.)

We discuss the crisis in the Midwest during the same time frame: the Dust Bowl. I explain how families—particularly farm families from the southern Plains states—left the Midwest for California and how this crisis affected their expectations of the American Dream. The result was an increased agricultural labor market in California (with more than 350,000 people fleeing the Midwest for California during the 1930s). These families were willing to work for less, which displaced many native California workers. Many of the displaced California workers did not have families to tend to and became migratory laborers: people, generally males, who roamed from ranch to ranch in search of work. This is where we meet George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*.

Day Two

I begin the class by playing music from the 1930s. I turn down the lights to add to the mood of the Great Depression. Throughout the classroom I display pictures of life in the 1930s.

For a visual connection, I created a Powerpoint graphics presentation using photographs from Dorothea Lange's collection. She was a prominent photographer in the 1930s and became known for taking pictures of what ailed the public. Most of her photos are centered around the depression and the agricultural labor crisis in California, just miles from where Steinbeck lived and wrote. Many of her photographs can be found in libraries as well as on the Internet. The Oakland Museum in California has an extensive collection of photographs. I used the following Internet sites to compile the presentation:

www.multimedialibrary.com/FramesML/developer.html

http://xroads.virginia.edu/ ~UG97/fsa/lang.html

At several points during this presentation, I read poems from Karen Hesse's collection *Out of the Dust,* written from a young girl's point of view about the Dust Bowl and what is happening around her. The students are better able to understand what this event was like by simultaneously seeing the photos and hearing the poetry.

(You could achieve a similar effect by displaying library books of Lange photographs.)

Finally, we talk about how all of this affected Steinbeck's writing. Students make connections with the labor crisis in California, how the migration from the Midwest affected native California families and wages. This discussion helps me gauge how much the students understand about the historical significance of Steinbeck's writing and naturally leads to a short discussion of Steinbeck's biographical information. A great deal of information can be found at the National Steinbeck Center Web site and at the San Jose State University Center for Steinbeck Studies:

http://www.steinbeck.org

http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/steinbec/srchome.html

Day Three

On the third day, after discussing the language and dialect Steinbeck uses, we begin reading *Of Mice and Men*.

I choose to cover the first three chapters using readers' theatre style. This entails a great deal of work at first, in photocopying the chapters and scripting out the lines for each character, but the students are very responsive to this method of reading.

Every day we read aloud in class, with the students reading lines for George, Lennie, Candy, and so on. The students are much more willing to participate, listen, and read along. They enjoy this method, and we actually cover the material more quickly than we would otherwise.

Stacey Miller, Foothill High School, Pleasanton, California

Determining Guilt in "Porphyria's Lover"

I adapted this activity from a textbook question following the Robert Browning selections in *Elements of Literature: Sixth Course* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1997). Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" is a poem that many students find intriguing, and the several steps to the activity heighten their understanding of the work.

Begin your lesson with an introduction to Browning, if students are unfamiliar with him, and then turn to "Porphyria's Lover." I have found that students like to read this poem aloud in class. The shock of Porphyria's murder is something they like to share.

Following a class reading and discussion of the poem, we discuss the disease porphyria. Myriad resources on this disease may be found on the Internet or in your library. Porphyria affects the nervous system or the skin, depending on the particular variety of the disorder, so there is a lengthy list of symptoms. I point out that many of the symptoms of this disease mimic the typical "symptoms" of vampirism. I also point out that porphyria is a shade of purple, which leads us to a discussion of color symbolism.

At this point, ask your class to decide whether Porphyria's lover is guilty of Porphyria's murder, or not guilty by reason of insanity. Students divide into "juries" to decide the question of guilt. I have found

that groups of three or four students generally work best. Ask the students to discuss the poem in terms of the lover's sanity. Did he realize what he was doing? If so, when? Was he sane when he did it? Why did he do it? The students should carefully evaluate the evidence. Remind them that since murder is a capital offense in most places, they must come to a consensus about the lover's guilt—in other words, in the event of a disagreement among jurors, if they can't convince one or more of the jurors to change their minds, they must declare a mistrial.

This jury deliberation is, of course, optional, but I have found that students have very lively and interesting discussions when they are required to come to a consensus. After each group has returned a verdict (they will probably need about 10 minutes), tally the verdicts so the students can see the results. A note of caution: be prepared in case students' verdicts are lopsided either for or against the lover's guilt. However, I have found that the groups usually come out even between the two verdicts. In either case, a discussion of the verdicts is in order, and you may even want to come to a class consensus (which would naturally involve a debate between students on both sides of the issue).

Other works of literature to which you may want to adapt this activity are Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" and Poe's "The Telltale Heart" or "The Cask of Amontillado." Other Poe stories would also work well.

Dana Cooke, Warner Robins High School, Warner Robins, Georgia

TEACHER TALK

Edgar Allan Poe

I'm looking for a little help here. I'm going to teach some Edgar Allan Poe this week. In our anthology we have "The Raven," "Annabel Lee," "To Helen," and "Eldorado," as well as some short stories. I plan to supplement the poetry with "Alone," "The City in the Sea," "The Conqueror Worm," "Lenore," "The Bells," and one or two others. Does anyone have a good activity, student-centered, that would involve these less-familiar poems? I thought about having groups illustrate them. However, we frequently do art-centered activities, so I don't

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want to overdo the drawing angle. I have the CD "Closed on Account of Rabies" and plan to use it, but I'm still looking for a way to broaden the Poe repertoire. The class is made up of students of varying ability levels.

Deb Beezley
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How about having students present the poems orally—or record them on audiotape or videotape?

Or have a panel discussion: "Edgar Allan Poe: Madman or Genius?" Have one "expert" convinced he is mad; the other, certain he is a genius. Let them take questions from the audience (class), with specific reference to these works as evidence to support one position or the other.

Some of these poems are available on audio recordings by Basil Rathbone and Vincent Price, among others. As a drama director, I once put together "An Evening of Edgar Allan Poe" in which we presented readings of his poems interspersed with original adaptations of several of his stories. Students selected appropriate background music to create a mood and effect.

Show scenes or snippets from several of Roger Corman's Poe movies of the 1960s that starred Vincent Price. *The Raven* is particularly awful but funny and campy; *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *Tomb of Ligeia* are among the better ones. You could also have students make a video of one or more of Poe's works. A fun one to do would be "The Cask of Amontillado."

Tom Stroup
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TEACHER TALK

The Catcher in the Rye

Does anyone have good ideas to use in teaching *The Catcher in the Rye*?

I used "Holden Caulfield's Scrapbook" assignment last year that resulted in wonderful visuals and writing. Here are the student guidelines:

Holden Caulfield's Scrapbook

Have you ever kept a scrapbook? If you have, or if you have looked at one created by a friend or relative, you will have noticed that it is a highly personal collection containing anything from snapshots, newspaper articles, or photos about oneself and others to poems and other writing. Artifacts as simple as concert ticket stubs can serve as symbols—or metaphors, if you will—of the individual.

How would Holden Caulfield's scrapbook appear? Your assignment is to provide a visual and written representation of Holden's life. This will demonstrate that you have read the book and understand the concepts of metaphor, imagery, point of view, and characterization.

You are to present the scrapbook assignment in two components. You will be provided a report folder; one side will contain the visual portion and the other the written portion.

Part One

This component of the assignment will be visual. In this "scrapbook" section, select 8 to 15 "artifacts" that represent Holden's philosophy and events in the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. Suggestions include the lost gloves, train ticket stubs, a duck feather, a piece of someone's clothing . . . that's all I will give you, or you'll use all my ideas! Reread the novel and collect ideas of your own.

The objects can be roughly drawn if an item is meaningful but too large to paste onto a page. Each item should have a caption explaining your choice, such as "Duck feather from Central Park, page 60." The images can be glued or taped on plain paper or notebook paper. Artistic ability will not be judged, but the images and captions must clearly indicate that you have been reading the book and analyzing your character.

Part Two

The written portion of the assignment will extend your literary analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye*, but with a twist. Instead of an essay, you may choose from any one of the suggestions listed below.

- "The World According to Holden Caulfield" is a pamphlet of aphorisms (concise statements or principles) that begin "Life is (like a) . . . ." Create three aphorisms Holden might have

written. With each one, identify an incident that inspired the aphorism.

- Write about an incident in the novel from another character's point of view (Spencer, Ackley, Sunny, cabdriver, or someone else). Describe elements such as plot, setting (including smells, temperature, light), and characterization (not "he was nervous" but "his leg bounced up and down like hell").
- Write a character profile of Holden for *People* magazine. Imagine him, for instance, as a Hollywood star or an obscure writer.
- Write a school yearbook personality profile. Look at old year books to model this style.
- Write Holden's obituary. You may project the deceased as an older Holden. Look in *The New York Times* for the best examples of obituary style.
- Write two poems to Allie describing events in Holden's life.
- Write the essay Holden wrote for Stradlater.

Criteria

Part Two must be one to two pages in length. I am looking for quality, not quantity. Your written piece should be engaging, maintain its focus, and be consistent in wording and phrasing. Your inventiveness and individuality should stand out, but do not try to sacrifice content for the sake of style. Preferably, the piece should be prepared with a word processor.

The cover: Label the report folder with your name and identify it as a scrapbook. You may decorate the cover any way you feel is appropriate.

To support this scrapbook project, I did lessons on metaphor ("Life is like . . .") to ease students into perspective taking.

I also did a group "jigsaw" project for this book with the same class; small groups worked on different categories, such as "Holden contradicts," "Holden protects the innocent," "____is immature/mature," "____is lonely," "____digresses," "____is a liar," and so on. We also explored issues of self-disclosure, and one group worked on chronology of the plot. After the groups worked to mine evidence of these categories from the book, they presented to the whole group.

I did this novel during my student teaching practicum, so it was the first lit course I taught. I loved teaching (and rereading after 30 years) this beloved book, and we all agreed that our interior monologues were decidedly altered for a couple of weeks.

Amy Metnick
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How about "Hot Seat"? Students divide into groups, and members of each group choose a character to "be." Each member then creates questions that the chosen character would ask all the other characters.

Then put the characters in the "hot seat" to field questions. For example, six Phoebes sit together and answer questions from Holdens and from all the other characters. It's great fun and illuminating, too.

Adrienne Rose
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Here are a few things we do with this novel. After students read chapter 12, I have them rewrite the scene with Horowitz in the cab from Horowitz's point of view. I get some really good writings, and the students show real skill at handling point of view.

My students have an ongoing project with *Catcher*. They compile a scrapbook of memorabilia that Holden might have collected during the novel. Each artifact must be captioned with the following information: where Holden got it and its significance to him.

In addition, students compile a writing folder, choosing from the following: D.B.'s story "The Secret Goldfish"; the essay Holden wrote for Stradlater; Dr. Thurmer's letter to Holden's parents; Holden's letter to Mr. Antolini after he leaves his apartment; Allie's obituary; a phone conversation between Holden and Jane; Horowitz's testimony at Holden's committal trial; a letter from Phoebe to Holden in the sanitarium; a conversation between Holden and D.B.; a character sketch of Ackley; a writing of their choice approved by me.

They can work on these projects in class while we are reading the novel and when we are not discussing it.

I also teach *The Catcher in the Rye* as a semi "hero's journey" novel paralleling the journey of Buddha. We read a few of Salinger's short stories and look into his attraction to Zen and how it is evident in so much of his writing. We sometimes read *Siddhartha*, too. After going

over the life and journeys of the Buddha, we trace Holden's journey.

We start with Holden's suffering caused by his resistance to change, his wanting to hold onto childhood and to protect innocence, and his inability to let go of the past and Allie's death. We move through his search for a companion (Sally, Carl). His descent into the abyss (the trip *to Central Park to find the ducks, where* he decides he is dying of pneumonia, and his trip home), his finding the mentor (first Phoebe, then Mr. Antolini), his moment of enlightenment and acceptance of change (at the carousel when he said, "If they fall, they fall, but it is wrong to say anything"). Students love finding all of the allusions to India and the East in *Catcher.*

I don't believe that dwelling on the "exciting" parts does justice to this little book, which is so rich in symbol and meaning.

Pat Schulze
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How about a walking tour of Holden's favorite locations: the skating rink at Rockefeller Center, the Central Park carousel, any other places mentioned by name or street? Start with a basic street map of Manhattan and pencil in locations and small illustrations of each.

Peggy Smith
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The November 1988 *English Journal* had an Exchange on the topic of challenged books, and *Catcher* comes up a lot in a series of exciting presentations/activities:

"Dealing with the Controversial Elements in *The Catcher in the Rye*" by Helen Frangedis

"Books, Students, Censorship: Reality in the Classroom" by Constance Reimer and Marcia Brock *(Brave New World, The Great Gilly Hopkins, Lord of the Flies, A Separate Peace, To Kill a Mockingbird, Slaughterhouse Five, The Chocolate War)*

"Studying Challenged Novels: Or, How I Beat Senioritis" by Carole A. Williams *(To Kill a Mockingbird, Huck Finn, Ordinary People, The Catcher in the Rye,* and *The Chocolate War)*

And in February 1997:

> "Banned Books: A Study of Censorship" by Jennifer Rossuck describes a four-unit study her senior English class did involving Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Catcher in the Rye* (using the Frangedis article), Lawrence and Lee's *Inherit the Wind*, and Chaim Potok's *My Name Is Asher Lev*.

Judith Angelo
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TEACHER TALK

Cry, the Beloved Country

Does anyone have any interesting teaching ideas for *Cry, the Beloved Country?*

Contributed to NCTE-talk

I'm teaching this novel right now. I love it. They love it. We all love it. Here are some ideas.

- *Found poem #1:* Students find an interesting or appealing passage. Length is for them to determine. They manipulate the language of the prose passage into a poem, paying attention to line breaks and so on. I then ask them to write an explanation (approximately 150 words) of the discoveries they made about the passage as they manipulated the language.
- *Found poem #2:* Thematic focus. Students find all the interesting and important quotes about some aspect in the work (fear, faith, race, power, the land, Kumalo, Msimangu, etc.) and piece those together in a poem as well. They must also write a thesis statement that guides their selection of evidence. Once they have created the poem, I have them write their thesis statement on the back of the poem. If I can write an interpretive statement about their poem that approximates their thesis statement, then I know

they have selected effective pieces of textual evidence. I assess them primarily on whether they have chosen the best evidence and if they have done a thorough job in finding the evidence. Other aspects involve appearance on the page, flow of the poem, spelling, and punctuation. They can add their own thoughts; the poem does not have to be solely quotes. I have them italicize their own words so I can see what they have done to bridge the gap between quotes. (I have had some great results with this project with this novel and with *Bless Me, Ultima*.)

I love both of the above, and so do students.

- *Key passage analysis:* Students choose one passage that is key to the novel. They then write a defense of why that passage is "key" to the entire novel. What do we discover about character, theme, literary style, and so on with this passage? Do we see ideas in the passage that we see elsewhere—connecting the passage to other parts of the novel?
- *Comparison of passages:* I haven't done this entirely yet, but I would like to find Lincoln's second inaugural speech (referred to by Arthur Jarvis), Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and Nelson Mandela's inaugural presidential speech and find the similarities with Jarvis's writings. Students could do posters or analyze the similarities between them.

I have found some Web sites about South Africa under apartheid that are fascinating. One has a breakdown of different standards for Europeans and blacks. For example, 80% of the population (blacks) live on 13% of the land. Spending in school for black students is 45 rand per pupil per year; for Europeans, 650 rand per pupil. There is one teacher for every 60 black students; one for every 22 Europeans. These statistics, by the way, are from 1978.

I think this novel lends itself to mandalas for the Kumalo, Msimangu, and James Jarvis, too. They are so richly developed.

Vincent Puzick
vpuzacris.com

I'm just finishing the book with my class. Some students found the book boring, but most loved it. Most of those who didn't like it found

the plot moved too slowly, and they weren't able to get into the deeper issues of the book.

The following discussion topics generated much student-directed participation:

- looking at the poetic aspects of the novel
- what the author is telling us in the chapters that don't seem to further the plot
- exploring how dialogue is used and the effect it has on the reader (one negative is that many students occasionally can't figure out who's talking)
- how the author makes Kumalo seem human (temptations, lies, occasional desire to hurt others, pangs of jealousy)
- the circle that is created between Absalom, Arthur Jarvis, James Jarvis, and Kumalo—their relationships and how they influence and affect one another
- the role of fear in the novel—who's afraid, of what, why?
- the ending of the novel (at dawn)—what is the author trying to communicate, what is the message?

Oh, there's so much to discuss! I also find it is important, at the beginning of Book II, to make sure students are clear on the names being used and the characters' relationships with one another—for example, John Harrison (son) versus Harrison (father).

I bring in copies of the Gettysburg Address and the lyrics for "God Save Africa" at appropriate points in our discussion.

After we read the chapter that discusses how Shantytown is built, the one with "Yes, I have a room to rent, but I don't want to let it" or something like that, we tried to imitate Paton's style of short snippets, or flashes, of events that build up to create an image in one's mind of a much larger situation.

Toward the end of the novel we wrote dialogues or scripts (student choice) in which Stephen and John Kumalo discuss some issues that we decided as a class they needed to work out. Many students had them talk over the situation of John having hired a lawyer to lie and protect his son. Some students looked a little deeper, working out some meaty philosophical issues.

I've got some discussion questions that I wrote to guide me in class—I didn't actually use all of them, but it gave me something to

work from. They're a bit disorganized, and some sections of the book are covered better than others, but I'll share them if you want.

My students knew nothing about the history of South Africa and had never heard of apartheid, so I started the unit with some historical investigations.

I love the book, and I predictably cry when Msimangu gives his savings to Kumalo, and when Kumalo learns that the lawyer "will take the case for God."

Suzanne Walter
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Another book of Malan's suggested to me which I have never been able to find is *Apartheid in My Knapsack*. Seems he tried to leave for awhile to shake off the reputation of his family. An uncle (I think; maybe a different kin—I don't know the exact connection) was heavy into apartheid. With the election of the Nationalist Party of Daniel F. Malan (1874–1959) in 1948, the practice of apartheid became official policy.

When I have time, which is not this year, I have students read Nadine Gordimer's short stories in *Six Feet of Country*.

If you can get music of Dollar Brand/Abdullah Ibrahim, especially *South African Ambassador,* you'll love him. Very cool jazz.

Read *Biko* by Donald Woods, also. Our library has a book by Alan Paton's son, Jonathan, which I use constantly. Very simply written but highly accurate and informative, *The Land and People of South Africa*.

Kate Mura

I discovered the music of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, which my students loved. They even asked for it to be played for weeks every time they did in-class writing, even exams. You can also find information on the Net about Ixopo High School, which students found interesting. Somewhere there I found information about South Africa printed both in English and Afrikaans. A Web search might turn up this information.

Just as we finished the book, we did a Quaker reading which turned into a very stirring experience. When we had finished discussing the book, I asked students to find one or two passages, short or long, that really spoke to them. With these marked, we sat facing one another,

and I explained the directions. When they felt "moved," one student would start by reading one of these selections.

When another student wanted to, he or she would add one, and it would keep on until each one had spoken at least once and continue until they knew they had arrived at the end. Even with those rather vague directions, the students were ready. The magic, however, appeared when after a few minutes of sharing lines, someone would hear a passage or a word and it would be a reminder of yet another passage to share. Quietly pages would be turned until those lines were found. The reading kept going until there was a natural stop. We were all amazed at the poetry created when lines from different sections of the book followed one another in a totally unrehearsed and unplanned way. In one of my classes, we sat quietly for a few moments after the end. Then, one student sighed and said, "Wow, that was REALLY something! Can we do it again this year?"

I think this story speaks to our spirits. I love it.

Mary-Sue Gardetto
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You might also try pairing the book with his *Tales from a Troubled Land* (short stories).

Jeri Pollock
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Have you come across any of the novels by the Booker Prize–winner J. M. Coetzee? His work is gut-wrenching and always thought-provoking. His latest work, *Disgrace,* has caused a stir. It's waiting on my bedside table.

Noeline Laccetti
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You might also get a book of short stories called *Somehow Tenderness Survives* written by various South African authors, white and black. There is also a wonderful poem by Dennis Brutus of the same title. I also try to have a speaker from South Africa come in to talk to the students.

Janet Slifkin
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FOCUS ON LITERATURE

Female Adolescent Immigrant Experiences in Young Adult Literature

by Gail P. Gregg and Dyanne Knight

Although all students go through physical and emotional "growing pains" during adolescence, our concern in this article is female adolescent immigrant students. These students grapple with conflicts and pressures that oftentimes continue to be an integral—though at times, unfortunate—part of their American experience. It has been our experience that adolescent immigrant females, more so than their male counterparts, seem to experience difficulty walking the fine line between the "old ways" and the "new ways." Studying personal issues relative to coming of age, in multicultural literature featuring adolescent female protagonists, is one way to help adolescent immigrant girls bridge the gap between the familiar old world and the strange new world.

This kind of literary focus will allow female adolescent immigrant students to see some of their own experiences reflected and validated; at the same time, it will help them link their lives to issues essential to a forever fluid and dynamic society where assimilation and modernization often causes major tension between the older and the newer generation and at times, the disintegration of family traditions.

Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, and Memory* (Vintage, 1994), Linda Crew's *Children of the River* (1989), and Esmeralda Santiago's *When I was Puerto Rican* (Bantam Doubleday, 1993) provide realistic and moving looks at the tension between traditional ways of living in three very different minority cultures versus the ways of the mainstream dominant culture. The female adolescent protagonists in these works are all confronted with the tensions inherent in living between two worlds, and the adaptations necessary to succeed in both the old and new culture.

Danticat introduces the reader to twelve-year-old Sophie, who is uprooted from the warm familiarity of her Tante Atie's Haitian home and sent to New York to live with her biological mother. While coping with her mother's mental instability, Sophie is also forced to learn the un-

familiar ways and language of her new country, and to face the negative perceptions her new peers hold regarding her background. Additionally, the traditions of her former culture clash forcefully with longings engendered by the new freedoms and opportunities Sophie is exposed to in America. Her attraction to a neighbor (Joseph) leads to the invocation of an ancient ritual, which drastically affects her self-perception and causes her to become estranged from her mother.

Sophie copes with the horror or her "testing" by mutilating her body and escaping to—and *through*—Joseph. She adjusts to the dichotomy of her world by discarding the old and embracing the new. Though her scars run deep, Sophie embarks upon a search for self-love and self-worth that leads her "home" to Tante Atie; it is there that she arrives at an understanding which enables her to unite the old with the new, thus making peace with herself, her culture, and her mother.

Teachers should be aware that the ancient ritual discussed in Danticat's novel consists of a painful and invasive test for virginity. The sensitive nature of this issue may cause discomfort among students if not addressed with great care. Rather than avoiding this issue, we suggest that teachers relate it to similar coming-of-age rituals found in other cultures. Examples include the scarring of flesh performed on young males as they approach manhood in selected African cultures, and the circumcision of young females as practiced by many Middle Eastern, South Pacific, and African cultures.

Much like Sophie, Sundara, in Linda Crew's novel, *Children of the River,* struggles with an attraction to someone outside of the acceptable realm of her culture. Torn between old traditions and the independence that America promotes, Sundara only wishes to fit in: "Things are different here," she is told by Jonathon, the American boy with whom she is enamored (70).

Her sincere attempts to be a "good" Cambodian girl are often in conflict with and sometimes defeated by her desire to follow her heart. She adapts to the conflict between the old and new by sneaking out to spend time with Jonathon. Rather than open defiance or repudiation of her culture's norms and mores, Sundara appropriates duplicity while striving to hold fast to the remaining vestiges of a tradition by which she is constrained.

From the taboos as innocuous as wearing makeup to the severity of liking the "wrong" person, Sundara struggles to adhere to the dictates of her culture while reaching for acceptance and ultimate happiness in

her culture. Ultimately, Sundara learns to trust herself and embrace happiness by being true to herself in her new surroundings.

Santiago addresses like issues in her autobiography, *When I Was Puerto Rican* (Vintage, 1993). She, however, chose to manage the instability of her family life and the strangeness of a new culture by burying herself in books at the school library. Whether at home in Puerto Rico or in her new culture in New York, Esmeralda found solace and escape through literature.

Furthermore, just as Sophie and Sundara were faced with language difficulties, Esmeralda also encountered that particular barrier; she met it head-on. With iron resolve, she refused to be placed in the seventh grade due to her woeful lack of English-speaking skills; she negotiated her way into the eighth grade, where she unflinchingly proved her capabilities. Esmeralda's self-confidence enabled her to stand up for herself and overcome the very first obstacle all non-English speaking immigrants confront: learning the language. She also managed to circumvent the stringent demands of her culture by altering her appearance after leaving home; she hiked up her skirt and applied makeup once away from the persistently watchful eye of her mother.

Teachers should note that there is a particularly sensitive issue portrayed in Santiago's novel. Specifically, there is a scene that graphically illustrates an older man masturbating in full view of the curious female adolescent protagonist. As with Danticat, we suggest addressing the issue of masturbation in a direct and open manner *within the context of Santiago's text.*

Although there are many worthwhile activities that one could use in conjunction with these novels, we suggest that students be asked to interview an older female member of their family. Questions should focus on the family member's memories of their own coming-of-age. Interview questions could be based on the following: (1) age at first date, (2) age when make-up began to be worn, and (3) age when first left alone or trusted by parents. After the interview, students could compare/contrast, using a Venn Diagram, the experiences of the interviewee and characters in the book. Through this activity, immigrant and mainstream students will have an opportunity to understand that the "coming-of-age" process occurs in all cultures and in all generations. It is not an immigrant thing; it is a human thing!

Each of these novels is aptly representative of its culture and offers a glimpse into the veritable realities of living between two worlds—

and the conflicts that are paramount to the female adolescent immigrant experience. Surreptitious behaviors and feelings of displacement or not fitting in are endemic to all three characters and are typical of most adolescents, immigrant or not. As with all teenagers, when authority (whether familial, cultural, or otherwise) and budding self-awareness become opposed, guile, rather than compromise, is oftentimes the result. The tension between traditional ways of living including strong family ties and the desire for a higher level of social and educational mobility within the immigrant communities, and the desire for the ways of mainstream culture including the desire for acceptance are characteristics found in all three novels. Providing female adolescent immigrant students a chance to transcend their own experiences through a variety of literary lenses will help them validate their coming-of-age experiences as they see the commonalties as well as the differences in this universally shared experience.

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3 EXPLORATIONS

Exploration and discovery are the focus of the teaching strategies in this chapter. Activities featured here promote the development of students' skills in critical thinking and listening, public speaking, brainstorming, interviewing, and expressing themselves in writing. These ideas will motivate you and your students. Included are activities to start the school year off with student questions, to trace the origin of words, to write a biography from another's point of view, and to compensate for students' stage fright.

20th-Century Interviews

I use an interview project at the beginning of my 20th-century American literature course to acquaint my students with some of the issues and themes we will encounter in our readings.

The guidelines I give to students are described below:

Part One: The 20th-Century Interview

Your assignment is to interview an interesting person who is over 60 years old about his or her life in the 20th century. This project is designed to provide the class with a sense of history using real people as sources.

We will discuss some of the major events in this century before you get started, but you should try to discover further details of those events in your interviews. For instance, you might explore your subject's involvement in the Civil Rights movement, the reasons why your subject immigrated to this country, the specific hardships brought on by the Great Depression, the changes caused by more women entering the workforce, and so on.

The person you choose can be a relative, friend, neighbor, or another older person who you think has lived a particularly interesting life.

15 Fascinating Questions

One of the most important parts of an interview is creating questions that will elicit responses worthy of a reader's attention. Being a good interviewer takes some finesse. You don't want "yes" or "no" responses—you want answers that include vivid details and that help provide a clear picture of the person's emotions and motivations.

Before you plan your interview, you are to come up with 15 fascinating questions. The list below includes some possible topics and questions. Meet with a partner and consider these topics (and others, if you want to add some). Work with your partner to draft 15 additional questions that will elicit detailed responses. You and your partner may use some of the same questions, or you may end up with separate lists.

1. Politics—What political issues have been important to you? Who have you voted for and why?
2. Gender roles—How have you been affected by gender roles? What might have been different in your life if gender roles were different?
3. Changes in values over time—How have your values changed over time? What changes have you seen in society's values over the years?
4. Daily life, life as a teenager—How would you describe your daily life when you were a teenager? How does the modern teenager's life differ from your experience?

Your aim should be to get a picture of the 20th century from the perspective of your subject. That picture should be as rich and detailed as you can make it. If possible, you might even ask to look over old photos with your subject, to listen to music that your subject listened to when he or she was growing up, or to hear stories about family mementos. Feel free to come up with any ideas that

help you get a more accurate picture of the life experience and perspective of your subject.

Your 15 fascinating interview questions are due on ____.

You may tape the interview (if equipment is available), but you must also prepare notes and turn them in. The more detailed your notes are, the better the paper will be.

Notes should be copied and handed in on____.

Part Two: The Biography

Once your interview has been successfully completed, you will write a 4- to 6-page typed paper about your subject. In preparation for writing your paper, you will first need to prepare the following elements.

All of these elements should be addressed in your paper. You will need to write a preliminary draft, review and revise it, and then turn in a final version. The basic structure should be the following:

1. A short character sketch describing your subject.
2. A selective biography—a basic outline of the events of your subject's life.
3. Ask yourself, "What parts of this person's life will make a good story?" Choose and write down 5–10 main points. Include at least one actual quote from your subject related to each main point.
4. Personal commentary—How has this interview affected you? How has it changed your knowledge and understanding about history and about the 20th century?

Use information and details from all of these preliminary writings to write your final paper, which should give a vivid picture of your subject and his or her views and experiences of the 20th century, as well as how you and your views of the 20th century have changed as a result of the interview.

Your final paper is due on____.

The results of this project are outstanding and a joy to read. Many students write about discovering that their elders are wise survivors.

Liz Rosenberg, Brooklyn Technical High School, Brooklyn, New York

English Methods Students Look Ahead

The students in my English methods class have spent quite a bit of time developing teaching ideas that they intend to use in their own classrooms. I include some of the best ideas below, some of which are variations on popular strategies. They're all outlined fairly simply but could easily be adapted for use if one takes your fancy.

- Take students to places where the atmosphere will help them understand the feelings and the mood of the work that they are reading. A park or a lake is an excellent place to read *Walden*. A trek to the local war memorial might offer an excellent setting for reading patriotic poetry or "The Declaration of Independence." If you cannot leave your classroom, come up with some imaginative props and decorations to help to create the proper atmosphere.
- Encourage students to give you a variety of unassigned writing. The sharing of this "volunteer" writing could be scheduled for a class period at some point or could serve as a fill-in if a lesson runs short. These writings could also be used as anticipatory sets or could provide logical conclusions to lesson plans.
- High school students could plan, write, design, and distribute trifolded brochures (made from folded sheets of paper 8½ by 11 inches or 8½ by 14 inches) dealing with different aspects of the writing process to primary students who are trying out their writing "wings." Preparing these pamphlets would help high school students quantify their understandings about writing and about audience. It might also be beneficial to ask students to write short promotional texts describing the purpose and goals of their brochures for their younger peers.
- Give students a chance to employ their imaginations and ingenuity. Provide each student with a picture (magazine, postcard, photograph, or any other source). Ask each student to write the beginning of a story based on that picture. At the end of three minutes, students exchange stories and continue writing. This process continues until each student has had the opportunity to add to each story. The stories are then returned to the originators, who provide a conclusion. The collaborative stories are shared with the class.

- To help students understand the importance of each part of speech, ask them to write a paragraph without using a particular part of speech (such as a paragraph with no nouns.)
- Ask students to write a résumé for a particular character in a novel as if that character were applying for a job. Students may use the character's personality, thoughts, experiences, qualities, or physical characteristics as they prepare the résumé. After the résumés are completed, students may assume the persona of their particular character and practice interviewing for a job.
- Instead of the usual "getting to know you" activities at the beginning of the year, ask students to create "name trees" to describe themselves. Students can use pictures, poetry, quotations, and anything else to "leaf" their trees in an effort to show themselves as they really are. This activity encourages students to think about themselves in a positive way and accomplishes the goal of getting to know each student in a nonthreatening, creative way.
- Another lively community-building activity is to have students choose a new name and a new identity. Students form a circle and introduce their "new" selves, complete with any special characteristics or talents that they would like to give this new identity. The only caveat is that students must give reasons for at least one of their added characteristics. For example, a student who makes her new identity 6' 2" tall might explain that she has always wanted to be a better volleyball player. Students have fun and get to know each other better in this activity. They also learn that everyone has wishes, regrets, and things they would like to change about themselves.
- Collect current event clippings and talk about them in class a couple of times a week, encouraging students to share their opinions about what is going on in the world. Some issues raised by these articles may lead to the writing of short opinion papers. Model for your students the acceptance of all viewpoints.
- Use song lyrics as an anticipatory set for a poetry unit. Hand out copies of the lyrics so that students can follow along as the music is played. Many students are not aware that song lyrics are a poetry form.

- Ask students to bring to class an item that they feel best objectifies them. Depending on what aspect of their lives they wish to emphasize, they might select a calculator, a computer mouse, a particular book, a flute, a soccer ball, rollerblades, a bike helmet, measuring cups, or CDs. Students then give short speeches explaining why they feel that the item represents them.

Ann K. Petersen, Buena Vista University, Storm Lake, Iowa

Word Origins

The idea for this exercise came from information about word origins included in *The Play of Words* by Richard Lederer (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972). Many of Lederer's books on language include chapters and passages that could be useful background reading for this type of activity.

This exercise shows students that the American version of the English language is really a multicultural stew, with words joining our language from many different sources. In addition, learning the culture of origin and earlier meanings of familiar words can help make students sensitive to the structure of language and can help them remember other words. I find that studying etymology is generally interesting to my students and serves to strengthen research skills.

Researching a word's culture of origin requires the use of a collegiate or unabridged dictionary. Make sure you have enough copies in the classroom or library before beginning the exercise.

I first write the following table on the chalkboard or provide students with a handout listing this information.

Word	*Language/People*	*Original Meaning*
1. gumbo	Bantu (African)	okra
2. bonanza	Spanish	fair weather
3. skunk	Algonquian (Native-American)	skunk
4. kamikaze	Japanese	divine wind
5. angel	Hebrew	messenger
6. piano	Italian	softly

I tell students that many different languages make up the American version of English, including the languages spoken by the groups whose literatures and cultures we have been studying: African, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Asian, Jewish, and Italian. We talk about the words and their origins, and I give students a chance to mention other words they know that originate in these languages. I then tell students that we will be conducting a word research exercise in which we will discover some word origins for ourselves.

We review several of the dictionary listings for the words above, so that students get a sense for the way in which the information is presented and have a chance to ask questions. Here's one example:

> skunk [of Algonquian origin; akin to Eastern Abenak; *segank* skunk] (1634)
>
> (from *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* 10th edition)

Then I give students the following handout.

Word Research Assignment

Using the dictionary, look up, read, and record the complete origin *(etymology)* of the words listed below. Give the language from which the word is taken, with no abbreviations. Wherever possible, include the original meaning of the word. Write the name of the dictionary or dictionaries used to find the information in the space provided at the bottom of this page. (Remember to underline book titles.)

Word	*Language/People*	*Original Meaning*
1. barbecue		
2. pecan		
3. banjo		
4. balcony		
5. tycoon		
6. alleluia		
7. juke box		
8. umbrella		

9. vanilla
10. alligator
11. fiasco
12. amen
13. zombie
14. tong
15. mosquito
16. studio
17. soprano
18. tote
19. judo
20. macho
21. yen
22. scapegoat
23. opera
24. banana
25. chocolate

Name of dictionary (dictionaries) used:_____

Students, working in pairs or alone, are given one or two days in the classroom or library to complete the sheet. Then we discuss the results as a class. Students are often surprised and interested at some of their findings—for instance, at the fact that the word *judo* comes from two root words that mean "gentle" and "art," or that the word *zombie* comes from a Kongo word, *nzambi*, meaning "god."

Students enjoy discovering the origins of familiar words and gain a new perspective on learning new words. This exercise also illustrates that although we may take words for granted and not think about their origins, our language is the product of all the cultures that make up our society.

Barbara Ingram, North High School, Denver, Colorado

Themed Bulletin Boards as a Collaborative Activity

This activity has students and teachers collaborating on creating bulletin boards—the teacher provides ideas tied to current themes of study and current reading, and students work in small groups to come up with additional issues and details appropriate to each bulletin board, to research the topics, and to create a final product that adds to their understanding of a theme or work of literature.

This activity gives students experience working in small groups and helps them develop ownership in a unit of study. It also creates attractive displays for the classroom that provide opportunities for continued discussion and learning.

I developed this idea with a colleague, Judy Eaton, as part of a workshop we taught on cooperative learning. We broke down the activity into nine steps:

1. Establish a quarterly or semester schedule of the due dates for the bulletin boards. Post the schedule.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Each group will be responsible for one themed bulletin board.
3. Provide a list of topics that tie in to current themes of study and to stories and books that have been or are scheduled to be read as part of the current unit.

   You could make your list of topics general—such as eras or periods (the Middle Ages, Romanticism, the Harlem Renaissance), genres (poetry, folktales, Greek mythology), themes (coming of age, heroes and heroines, the American Dream), or literary elements (imagery, symbolism, mood). Or you might make your topics specific—Such as works of literature *(Romeo and Juliet, The Sun Also Rises, Raisin in the Sun)* or authors' names (Chaucer, Stephen Crane, Maya Angelou).
4. Allow class time for groups to meet, brainstorm, draft ideas, and design their bulletin boards. Students can begin their brainstorming by thinking of people, places, things, and ideas that relate to the given theme and that might be depicted somehow on their bulletin board. Encourage them to be imaginative and to think broadly about their particular theme.

For example, a group presenting a bulletin board about the Harlem Renaissance might include references not only to such authors as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen but also to such Jazz Age artists as Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington as well as to working and living conditions of Harlem's African American community in the 1920s.

A group working on a bulletin board about *Romeo and Juliet* might include references to themes and characters in the play and might also include references to Shakespeare's life, historical events, and other aspects of the Renaissance, including scientific discoveries, fashions, musical trends, and political climate.

Students will need computer time and library time for research; they may also be advised that Web sites on their topics might have pages that can be printed out as a source for text or pictures. Ask students to keep their plans and materials organized in a folder so that all the materials are ready when the time comes for each group to put up its assigned board.

5. Provide a means for students to request special materials as they prepare their bulletin boards. Depending on how ambitious students feel, materials they might need include scissors, tape, construction paper, drawing paper, pens and markers, magazines to cut up for pictures, glitter, fabric swatches, fabric glue, and other art supplies.

6. The more imagination students put into this assignment, the more time they will need to assemble their final product. Schedule special times when your room will be available, possibly before school, at lunch, and after school, so that students will be able to work on their boards when class is not in session.

7. Set a deadline for the completion of each bulletin board. Try to schedule new bulletin boards so that they are completed the day before a new unit starts.

8. As the finished products are ready, have each small group "present" their bulletin board to the class, explaining the images, the symbols, and the thought processes and intentions that went into its creation. For more complex projects, it helps if students prepare a key to their bulletin board, explaining the meaning or symbolism of all the elements. This allows other students and visitors to examine the board more closely at another time.

9. Finally, enjoy the color, creativity, and insights that student bulletin boards bring to your classroom.

Marie Rogers, Independence High School,Charlotte, North Carolina

"No Present" Can Be the Best Present of All

As an adult who is forever enraptured by the picture-book section in libraries and bookstores, I have always included literary and artistic analysis of picture books in my middle and secondary school language arts classes. Often I have challenged students to retell or recast their own writings in picture-book format. This retelling of personal experiences allows students to critically analyze and interpret text for a particular audience—younger readers. After they recast these texts for younger readers, my students get immediate feedback as they share their adaptations through reading aloud to children in grades 1 and 2.

Another picture-book strategy that presented itself recently involved Carrie Best's book *Three Cheers for Catherine the Great!* (Du Ink, 1999; illustrations by Giselle Potter), in which the main character, Sara, seeks "no presents" for the birthday of her Russian grandmother, who has declared that "the best presents are no presents." Sara ultimately decides to give her grandmother the present of teaching and learning—teaching her English and learning the Russian language from her.

In reading and discussing the book and designing "no presents" of their own for family members and friends, students use literacy skills and connect with family and adult concerns. Additional follow-up activities enhance the value of this strategy as a multi-generational learning project.

In Advance

Ask the students to bring in, if possible, a photograph or note or piece of memorabilia (such as a postcard, souvenir, stamp, small gift, decoration, household utensil) that they associate with an older relative, friend, or neighbor. Suggest that the students be prepared to tell about

the older individual's background (where did he or she grow up; if relevant, when did he or she immigrate to the United States or move from one region of the country to another). Finally, have the students ask the individual how he or she celebrates birthdays, what are some favorite or memorable gifts he or she has received in the past, and what gifts he or she looks forward to receiving.

Some students may not have family or caregivers who are available during after-school hours. To make certain these students can actively participate in the project and to provide other options for students or families who do not wish to share family life experiences, you should arrange in advance for adult volunteers to be available for this activity. Contact members of the adult school community (colleagues, support staff, administrators, custodial staff, paraprofessionals, parent volunteers, retirees) who can serve as human resources. Students could meet with these volunteers in a readily accessible place—a corner of the classroom, the library, the school cafeteria, at a computer stall, or in an equally convenient spot.

Immediately Prior to Reading the Story

Before reading Best's book, give the students the opportunity to share with the class the items and information they received from the older adults. Have interesting facts, quotes, and the birthday details listed by a student recorder on the board or a poster.

Reading Aloud

During and after the reading of the story in class, the following discussion activities are effective ways to expand on the ideas in the story.

- Ask students if they can identify the language other than English that is included in the text (Russian) and why they think this foreign language and alphabet were inserted. My students usually suggest that it's to make the story seem more real.
- Ask the students to explain what it means to have "a little English." Encourage them to share their own knowledge and stories of friends or family who also have "a little English" and to relate any experiences they might have had in helping these friends and family members with English (as Sara does in the story).

- Have the students react to the concept of a party with no presents. Ask them how they would feel about having such a birthday party themselves or throwing one for a cherished friend and family member.
- Provide the students with an opportunity to discuss Sara's grandmother's reason for wanting no presents—"I have music in my Russian bones, and laughing in my heart. I have the day and the night, and I have all of you. That's why for me the best presents will be no presents." What does Grandma mean? Do students understand why she says this? Do they know anyone who feels this way?

After Reading the Story

Challenge students to think of one special person in their lives who would be pleased with a "no present." Invite them to create a personalized "no present" for this special person. (It's up to each student as to whether they actually give this "no present" to the individual or not.) Also ask students to write an explanation of why their choice is appropriate for its recipient. Once students have drawn, conceived, or constructed their "no presents," provide them with an opportunity to share the "no presents" in class. Encourage students to comment on one another's ideas and to identify those that could be adapted for persons in their own lives.

Have students develop a school- or classroom-based exhibit, bulletin board display, or poster of "no present" drawings, models, or explanations.

Some Follow-up Ideas

• *Immigration Picture Books:* "My_____ (relative) came to America from_____ (country) on a _____(mode of transportation)." Ask the students to share any stories of relatives or adults they know (including the person they interviewed for this "no present" project) who have immigrated to the United States. Encourage them to arrange interviews with these people and to record details and exact quotes about the journeys of these adults. Then students can retell this story in their own words through a picture-book format and share it with the person they

interviewed and with the class. Students may also want to look at Allen Say's *Grandfather's Journey* (Houghton Mifflin, 1995) as another evocative immigration picture-book story.

"When They Came to America" Class Anthology. Invite students to conduct interviews with relatives and adults they know who have immigrated to the United States. Students then work together to write these stories in the form of a class anthology titled "When They Came to America." The photocopied anthology could be made available to the relatives and adults who contributed stories and could serve as a prototype for a yearly series of immigration storytelling and publishing activities.

• *Sharing Stories about Teaching and Learning:* In *Three Cheers for Catherine the Great,* Sara decides to give her grandmother the present of teaching and learning. Students who have helped or are currently helping family members and other adults to learn English can share how they are doing it and what the results are. Are they working with written materials? Are they simply helping to correct words and phrases as needed? Do they know of other family members who have helped relatives and friends to learn English or another language? If there are any students whose family members are teaching them a language other than English, invite them to share stories about this process, too.

Rose Reissman, Community School District #1, New York, New York

Silent Chalk Talk

This activity is great for brainstorming what students think about a topic, sharing perspectives, getting everyone involved, and developing a greater understanding. Students' thinking processes are apparent in the way they respond to the topic.

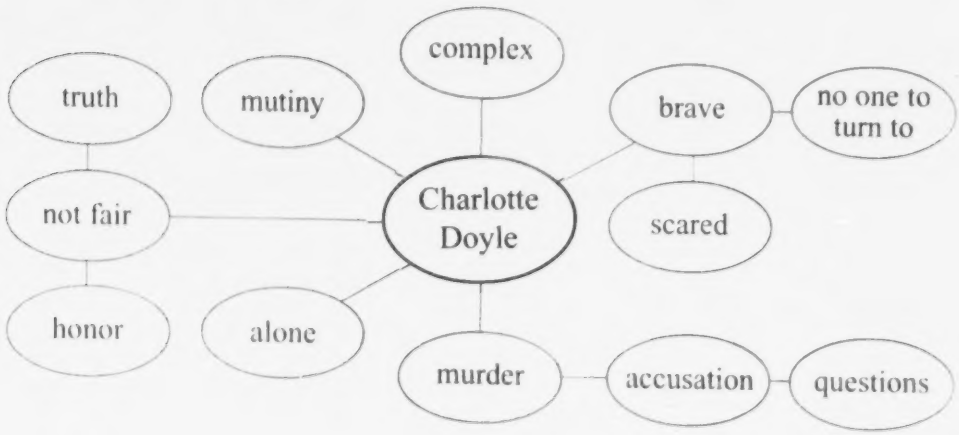
The teacher passes out chalk to small groups, explaining that only the person with the chalk may be up at the board, so there needs to be an equitable method of sharing within the group.

A large section of the chalkboard is cleared except for a small circle

in the center containing an important, thought-provoking word or short phrase. This might be a topic that will be a unit of upcoming study, a character or event from a text that students are reading, or any word or phrase that gets students thinking and that involves multiple perspectives.

Students have several minutes to contemplate the word. Then, one or two at a time, students move to the board to add a word near the original word, plus a connecting line, with the goal of ultimately creating a web of thoughts and ideas. Demonstrate that new ideas come from the original circle and that when ideas arise that connect or relate to other ideas already represented on the board, students may connect those words with connecting lines. It may help if you provide a sample or add the first word or two to get the process going.

Here's a sample chalk-discussion from our classroom:



The rules are that this activity is conducted in silence and that all eyes are focused on the chalkboard. Also, there should not be any repeats of ideas—each addition to the chalkboard should be a fresh word or phrase.

At the end of the silent discussion, there is an impressive web of words and ideas about a topic, person, or event—questions that can start a discussion, initiate a writing assignment, or simply provide a review of an important topic.

Hollyanna Bates, Platt Middle School, Boulder, Colorado

Students as Movie Critics

Asking students to think about movies and to play the role of movie critics gives them a chance to consider and articulate their own responses to movies they enjoy. It also provokes interesting class discussion on such issues as theme, character development, acting ability, casting, and other aspects of moviemaking.

I first ask students to write in their writer's logs about two or three movies they have seen and remember fairly well. They are to list as many people involved with the film as they can remember—actors, directors, writers, and so on. If they cannot remember names, they will need to do a little research (checking film reference books or Internet sites; calling a video store, local theater, or librarian). I also ask students to record a plot sketch and notes about the film. Their notes should be specific and as complete as possible, including both positive and negative comments and observations.

Using multiple movies gives students the power of choice, and it also provides them with the safety net of a "plan B" in case one idea falls through.

Then we tackle the following activities. I include notes on advance teacher preparation as well as student instructions for each activity.

Activity One

Bring in and discuss some examples of newspaper critiques before starting this activity. Have students look at and discuss the type of language used. Ask them to judge how effective or ineffective each review is. Then ask students to write their own favorable review of a film.

Directions for students: Take on the role of a newspaper's movie critic. Write a review of the film that is a "two thumbs up" type of review. Not every idea has to fully support the movie, but the overall feeling of the article should be one expressing how good the movie is. Avoid using too many broad generalizations and exaggerations, or you could weaken your argument. Since this is a review and not a summary, you don't have to describe the whole plot or write pages and pages, so think carefully about what information will be important to include. Come up with a title that catches the reader's attention and that also captures the spirit of your review.

Activity Two

If you can obtain movie posters, bring some in before starting this activity. If you do not have any on hand, check with movie rental places or a local theater ahead of time. Old posters work just fine (and can make great room decorations). Point out to students the amount of writing, the quotes that are chosen to be included, and what makes the posters appealing or not so appealing, effective or not so effective. Have markers, scissors, paper, and old magazines or newspapers available for student use. Depending on your time situation, you may choose to take one class day to discuss the assignment and let students get started on their posters. Then they can complete the work at home.

Directions to students: Make a poster (see me for the poster board) that could be hung in a theater or video rental store to "sell" your chosen film to people. You will need to include a picture or design of some sort, a quote from at least one review (you can make up the review and fake the names of the critic or newspaper—or you may want to quote the review you wrote in activity one), and the name of the film. What other things might be added to make the poster more effective and appealing? Think about how long people usually spend studying a poster like this. What does that tell you about how much you can and should include and the presentation (size, color, format) of certain information? We will be hanging these posters in the classroom and the hallways, so make sure you'll be showing off your best stuff!

Activity Three

You may want to pull out the published reviews again as a reminder for students as they prepare a negative review. Also, ask them to look at their writer's log notes and their positive review of the film for reference. After the writing is done, discuss the differences between the two reviews.

Directions to students: Take on the role of a newspaper's movie critic (a different one from the last time) who does *not* enjoy the film. Notice the different things you emphasize compared with the positive review from activity one. Again, try to be persuasive, but watch out for exaggerations and generalizations.

Activity Four

Do a mini lesson on personal letter writing sometime prior to this activity. Another option is to wait until after the activity for the lesson and to use this writing as a draft that will most certainly require a few touch-ups. Stress that students are to give their honest opinion of the film in this letter and should write the letter to a real friend. They may explain to their friend that this letter is part of a classroom assignment and may opt to actually send it off to the person later.

Directions to students: Write a letter to a friend describing your honest-to-goodness opinion of the film. Think about how the language you use in this letter differs from the language you used in your positive and negative pieces. How are your goals different? Be prepared to talk about the differences between writing this letter and writing the other two pieces.

Follow-up

After completing these activities, take some time to let the students look at each other's work and discuss effective and less effective uses of language. Let them tell you (and each other) what they discovered about word choices, audience, and purpose in writing. What did they learn about the use of generalizations and exaggerations? How was the letter writing different from the writing of the two reviews?

In discussing these important issues, we also end up discussing some of our favorite movies and actors and why we like them. Since virtually everyone sees an occasional movie, this can make for a lively and enjoyable discussion that involves the whole class.

Lisa Slack, Norwell Middle School, Ossean, Indiana

Passing Notes

Here's a quick activity that focuses student attention on something they recently learned or reveals what students already know about a topic. It helps them share their knowledge and points out areas in which they need help.

1. Students begin with a blank sheet of paper and put their name at the top.
2. On the overhead or chalkboard, write a question to which you want students to respond, such as:

   What do you already know about the elements of poetry?

   What do you remember about beginning a research project?

   What have you learned about the Renaissance in our recent study of the period and its literature?

   What do you know about creating a vivid character?

   From our reading of the first third of the book, what plot details would you share with someone considering reading *To Kill a Mockingbird?*
3. Give students time to think and write down at least three pieces of information, using no more than half the page. Two to three minutes is normally enough time.
4. Then begin the process of passing notes. Following a snake pattern around the room, students pass the papers with their notes to the next person (either in front of or behind them). That person reads the original notes, writes his or her initials in the left margin, and adds one or two short notes. The new notes must provide additional information and not repeat something already said.
5. The note passing continues in the same direction using the same process for a set number of minutes or a set number of times, depending partly on the depth of the question and how much students might have to say on a particular topic. A minimum of three passes is suggested.
6. When the passing of notes is completed, each paper is returned to the original student. The originator then shares aloud with the class something from his or her note. Students may run out of new details before everyone in the class has had a chance to share, but it is acceptable at this point to repeat something already said. It's also useful to allow students to follow up with questions or to make related comments on the topic.

You may choose to collect the notes or not—the thinking and sharing are the important parts of this activity. They are likely to provide

valuable review for students and to help you see how much students understand about a particular topic.

Anna Parks, Norwell High School, Ossian, Indiana

Let Me Tell You All about It

This public speaking exercise helps students express their ideas briefly on a subject of their choice and gives them experience in critical listening and evaluating oral presentations. Although I've used the activity just with middle school students, I believe any group would enjoy it and benefit from it.

I give students a topic similar to one of the following:

1. Sound off (students talk about something that has been irritating them, such as cafeteria food, too much homework, or perhaps a larger problem)
2. "Something that I do well"
3. A favorite book, movie, or TV show (a brief summary and an explanation for their choice)
4. How to (an explanation to the class of how to make something)
5. Student's choice (students pick the topic and obtain teacher approval)

Criteria—I usually give the students about two weeks to prepare for their presentations. When they come to the podium, I expect them to project their voices, make their presentations interesting, stand straight, maintain good eye contact, and speak for less than two minutes. (If a student has more to say, I usually allow another minute or two, within reason.)

Evaluation—In order to keep the students on task while their classmates are presenting, I give each student an "evaluation sheet" with the following three columns to fill in: Speaker's Name, Topic, and Comments. This requires students to pay close attention to each speaker.

Grading—Students receive one grade from me based on the above

criteria, and they receive one grade for their completed "evaluation form."

I have had great success with this in the past. Students are very honest in their evaluations, and the brevity of the talks makes them less intimidating than other public-speaking assignments, as well as requiring students to choose their words carefully.

Sandra Morgan-Phillips, Black Middle School, Houston, Texas

Researching the Year I Was Born

In this activity, each student, through interviews with relatives and guardians and through library and Internet research, writes a short paper on the year of his or her birth—what was going on in the world and, optionally, what was going on in the family. The twist in this version is that the paper is written from a point of view of a real or fictional older sibling.

The family interviews are not essential: some students' family situations may make it inconvenient or impossible to interview parents or relatives, and these students may interview a guardian or older friend of the family, may focus on the research aspect of the assignment, or may choose to create fictional interviews with relatives. All students have the option of creating a fictional older brother or sister to be the viewpoint character.

I give students the following guidelines:

Student Guidelines

1. In the library, consult periodicals such as *Time, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News and World Report* for the month and year you were born.
2. Search for your birth date on the Internet. Many sites give information for your birth date throughout history. To narrow down the information to the month and year in which you were born, search your birth date and the following days for one month and choose only those events that occurred in your birth year.

3. Use the search engine of your choice. Some possible URLs that you could use are the following:

   http://www.historychannel.com/tdih/index.html

   http://www.inthe80s.com/

   http://www.rocknrollvault.com/timeline.htm

   http://www.calendarhome.com/tyc/

   http://www.olywa.net/blame/cal/index.htm

   http: //www.scopesys.com/anyday/

   http://www.yahooligans.com/docs/tdih/

   http://features.yahoo.com/history/

   http://www.elibrary.com/

4. Interview your parents, guardians, or older relatives about your birth and first year of life, if possible. Or use your creative powers to create a fictional interview about your first year of life.

5. Choose an older brother or sister (a fictional one, if you wish) as your viewpoint person and interview this person (or create a fictional interview) about his or her feelings and memories about your first year. Feel free to use your sense of humor if it seems appropriate.

6. Record all of your information from your interviews and research in your journal. Include all information you will need to prepare a works cited page. (Check any handbook of ALA style.)

7. Some types of information you might want to find during your research: commercials, slogans, births, deaths, sports news, movies, books, plays, music, local events, financial news, national news, international news, religious events, and so on.

8. Things you might want to include from your interviews: names of parents or guardians, names of other family members, pets, significant family events (in addition to your birth), activities and hobbies that members of the family were involved in, extended family members, favorite music, favorite holidays, and so on.

9. Weave all of this information together into an interesting short paper. Include a works cited page.

Here are excerpts from a short model paper that I share with students:

> Things were going along pretty great. I had my mom and dad to myself and a great big bedroom. Kindergarten was still a couple of years away, so my days were full of games. All of that changed on August 14,1983.
>
> On that night my little brother, Jerry Gordon, was born. According to mom, he wasn't really a little brother. Weighing in at 12 pounds and 3 ounces, it was an experience my mom will never forget.
>
> My dad was the manager of a farm implement store, and things were a little rough financially for my family during Jerry's first year of life. Farm prices were down and interest rates were high. In addition, that fall the stock market took a dive. Since Dad's business depended on a strong farm economy, we started pinching pennies . . . .
>
> While Mom hummed along with Sting and "Every Breath You Take," I tried to introduce Jerry to the Saturday morning delight of "The Littles," "Smurfs," and "Shirttales," at least when we could get Dad away from "The Dukes of Hazzard." Jerry was more interested in chewing on all of my dolls and books. Mom said he was "teething," as though that made it all right when he destroyed my favorite Barbie.
>
> As Jerry moved from the bottle to baby food, Baltimore beat Philadelphia in a 4–1 World Series.
>
> In the world sad and happy things happened in the year Jerry was born. The USSR shot down a South Korean plane, flight 007. M*A*S*H aired its final episode to a huge audience. Jerry fell down the front steps in his walker and had to have seven stitches.
>
> I got the white kitten and the Cabbage Patch Kid that I wanted for Christmas, and Jerry just got clothes and baby junk. Then, in January, Jerry said his first word–"Kaki." My name is Kathy. I started to look at him differently. . . .

Patricia Schulze, Yankton High School, Yankton, South Dakota

TEACHER TALK

Dry-Erase Boards

I was given this idea at an after-school workshop that I attended at my school, so I will share just in case it inspires someone else.

The presenter suggested making small dry-erase boards—about the size of a slate—so that each student in a class could have one. Students love to write on these with markers; they are easy to clean, produce no papers to grade, and keep everyone occupied. Because I attended the workshop, I was given three boards to try as well as instructions for making my own. My ideas for using them include having my students describe the characters in a novel we are reading and as graphic organizers. The possibilities are limitless.

Here are the directions I was given for making the boards: Buy a board of Melamine. It can be found in building supply stores in the paneling department. It comes in a 4- by 8-foot sheet. Cut it into boards of the desired size. The presenter used 1 foot by 1 foot, which would give you 32 boards. Sand the edges so they are smooth.

Carla Smith
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I've done this for my class, but instead of sanding the edges (takes too much time), I covered them with red tape. It looks nice and protects students from splinters.

A classroom set can be made for about $30—including the tape. Have all the students bring in two or three markers at the beginning of the year if you can. Then you'll have a collection. I've heard that some teachers ask students to bring in old socks to use as erasers, but that seems gross to me. I just cut up an old sheet.

Suzanne Walter
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I use individual student dry-erase boards to do a lot of things. We sometimes play a Pictionary sort of vocabulary game. I don't have my own set of boards—they belong to a teacher down the hall, but we all borrow them. I think that the major problem is having enough erasers.

The boards are well worth the money—especially if you go in with a few other teachers.

Mary Johnson
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Another idea popped in my head for your tablets. We are currently doing some review for NMSQT/PSAT (it would work for any standardized test review info). I often put students in groups and give them sets of questions.

They could write answers on the board or write 3 words they learned in 10 minutes, or some other review technique. This might improve the atmosphere for a review process that often becomes deadly.

Lynn Culp
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TEACHER TALK

First-Day Questions

On the first day of class, I give every student a half-sheet of paper before I tell them anything or hand out anything else. Then I ask for three questions and a suggestion from each student.

At least the first two questions have to be about my class or the school (freshmen have many questions pertaining to school); the third question may be personal or a trivia question to test me or a question on just about anything. (One clever student asked, "What time is it?")

I tell students that the better the questions, the better the answers. For example, if someone asks an imprecise question, such as "Do you give a lot of homework?" I can only say that it depends on what they mean by "a lot."

I spend the whole first class reading and answering the questions out loud, making up silly answers where possible. It gives us a chance to laugh together and to get to know one another, and it breaks the ice on the first day.

Lynne Gannon
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FOCUS ON GRAMMAR

If You Must Teach Traditional English Grammar, Make It Short and Sweet. Then Get on to the Business of Writing and Literature.

by Ron Featheringill

I have taught high school English for more than twenty years and Business Writing at the university level for ten years; I have seldom encountered a teacher who enjoys teaching grammar in the traditional manner. Why? Most teachers who can teach English grammar do not like the subject. They remember the countless hours spent listening to their English teachers drone on and on about nouns, pronouns, and predicate adjectives. It was the time of day to catch up on lost sleep; it was the subject that made us *hate* English and shudder at the idea of passing on this kind of information to another human being. Human beings deserved better treatment.

And then when the "dead horse" of grammar was beaten enough, we were allowed to study literature and write about it. A light went on, beauty entered our lives, and suddenly dreaded English became a passion. We loved the subject, and we broke our vow never to become English teachers. Now it seemed like the only occupation that made sense and was actually fun.

But somewhere in the closet was the horrible specter of English grammar. We wondered where and when this feared apparition would shake its gory locks at us. I have a confession to make, and I wonder how many of us would reveal as much. I did not know the difference between a preposition and a predicate nominative until I actually started teaching English at the high school level where English grammar (taught in the traditional manner) was mandated by the curriculum.

Enter Banquo's ghost, and having no other alternative, I quaked in my boots. I remember pouring over grammar books which were always twenty years old, and making sure that I "had the right answers" so I would not make a mistake when we started identifying the eight parts of speech. I never wanted to tell other teachers that I did not know fundamental English grammar, but I found it odd that they were com-

ing to me to ask about identifying difficult parts of speech. I guess my hours studying outdated grammar books were beginning to pay off.

Then I remembered a curious incident which happened to me earlier when I was an undergraduate studying upper division Shakespeare at the University of California at Santa Barbara. One day the instructor asked us to find ten lines in King Lear and identify the part of speech of each word in the passage. We handed in this assignment at the end of the class and received it back graded at the next meeting. Absolutely no one had passed! No one spoke a word. Even the instructor said nothing. All the students were relieved when no more assignments of this nature were forthcoming. We knew very little about "basic" English grammar, but we were writing acceptable papers. It took me years to discern the meaning of this experience.

In a recent study my colleagues and I at California State University, Fullerton, discovered that most of our students (almost one-third of them are Asian) already know the basic rules of English grammar, but have difficulty stringing the words into sentences, the sentences into paragraphs, and the paragraphs into readable memos, letters, proposals, and research papers.

We discover their writing problems by giving them diagnostic assignments and in-class writing experiences where they must write on their own without the help of friends and relatives. In fact, nearly 60 percent of our writing is done in class. We ask our students to rewrite their papers once we help them discover their errors and submit them for a second reading. We give their documents a third reading when the students submit them in their final portfolios, collections of their "perfected" assignments from the entire semester. The portfolio is worth 200 points out of a possible 1,000 points, so the assignment is worth doing correctly. We teach our students that writing, revising/proofreading, and rewriting are essential steps in the writing process. I would suggest asking students at the high school level to submit portfolios of their perfected essays at the end of the semester so they can understand what accurate writing is all about and see that they can actually achieve it.

Does teaching accuracy in writing have to be a laborious, boring activity? Absolutely not. There are only about four or five kinds of mistakes that students in high school and college habitually make:

1. SPELLING ERRORS. There is no good excuse for spelling errors.

Whether or not English is one's second or sixteenth language, everyone can use (or should use) a dictionary. Computer spell-checks are certainly useful, but the time-honored dictionary will help the student tell the difference between *isle* and *aisle.*

2. RUN-ON SENTENCES. My favorite outdated grammar book renders the following example of a "fused" sentence:

Balboa gazed upon the broad Pacific his heart was filled with awe.

When you inform your students that this is a run-on sentence and ask them where it "goes wrong," almost half the class members immediately tell you, "between *Pacific* and *his.*" How can one fix this "sentence"? The student can place a comma after *Pacific* and add a conjunction. The student can place a semicolon after *Pacific*. He or she can create two sentences out of the fused sentence. Or, he or she can reduce one of the clauses to a subordinate clause by adding a subordinating word: *When Balboa gazed upon the broad Pacific, his heart was filled with awe.*

A "comma splice" sentence is a run-on sentence in which a comma is attempting to do more work than it can do. It is the grammatical equivalent to building your house with paper exterior walls. The grammar book gives the following example:

The witness was unwilling to testify, he was afraid of the accused man.

One can fix this problem as we fixed the "fused" sentence above.

How does one check for "comma splice" sentences in one's writing? I urge my students to find the commas in their writings, especially the commas in long sentences. Let us return to the example above. I ask the students to find the comma in the statement. Then I ask them to determine if everything to the left of the comma is a complete statement which could stand on its own. For example, does *The witness was unwilling to testify,* make sense by itself? They usually agree that it does. Then I ask, "Does everything to the right of the comma express a complete thought?" They agree that *he was afraid of the accused man* does make sense on its own. I then ask them if there is a conjunction on the right of the comma or any other type of punctuation with more force than a comma (such as a period or a semicolon). They agree that there is not. Then we agree

that we have a comma-splice sentence before us which is a major, but fixable, grammatical error.

3. SENTENCE FRAGMENTS. My faithful grammar book (*Prentice-Hall Handbook for Writers,* 6th ed. 1974.) offers the following example (the first statement is a good sentence while the underlined one is a fragment):

He leaped through the window with a crash. Because there was no other way of escaping the fire.

How does one check for sentence fragments in his or her writing? My colleague Craig Hargis at CSUF presents "the bus-stop check for sentence fragments." He urges us to imagine that we are late and waiting at a bus stop for our bus. We are preoccupied with getting home where we will meet our loved ones. Suddenly someone runs up to us and utters, "Because there was no other way of escaping the fire!" Would we know what the person was talking about? No. Of course not. We only have part of the thought; we have a sentence fragment. How can we fix this problem? Here are the ways, and the instructor can offer whatever grammatical explanation he or she likes:

He leaped through the window with a crash because there was no other way of escaping the fire.
He leaped through the window with a crash; there was no other way of escaping the fire.
He leaped through the window with a crash. There was no other way of escaping the fire.

The instructor can replace the bus stop with a burning house in the neighborhood or with any other distracting scene he or she likes. I find that capturing the students' imaginations is preferable to more traditional "dry as dust" methods of locating sentence fragments.

4. PRONOUNS. Almost everyone makes mistakes like the one following, and I believe that the error below is a serious one in writing.

Everyone should exercise their right to vote.

I make this mistake (which some instructors believe is an informality rather than an error) several times a day when I am lecturing or speaking to other people, but I eliminate it from my writing. We

hear others ignoring the rule that "a pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number," and the mistake is made on the radio and on TV constantly. Faulty pronoun usage is a spin off from our efforts to avoid sexism in language. When I ask my students how their grandparents would have written the statement above correctly, some of them tell me:

Everyone should exercise his right to vote.

This is sexism, and we all run away from such language today (or should). But how do we solve the problem? We can write, *Everyone should exercise his or her right to vote,* but if we stick to the antecedent *everyone* in a paragraph we often find ourselves repeating *his or her* over and over again. The best approach is to pluralize the antecedent from the beginning changing *everyone* to *people* or *Americans* (or any other plural word) and retaining the pronoun *their.*

Americans should exercise their right to vote.

The troublesome indefinite pronouns are singular: each, either, neither, one, everyone, everybody, no one, nobody, anyone, anybody, someone and somebody. I urge my students to test these words to see if they are singular or plural. Taking *everyone* as an example, would we say, *Everyone is on time,* or *Everyone are on time?* Everyone knows that the former is correct, so the pronoun must be singular.

5. SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT. Oddly, I do not find as many instances of subject/verb agreement problems as I find spelling errors, run-on sentences, sentence fragments and faulty pronoun usage. In high school or at the college or university level, a student who habitually makes agreement mistakes needs the help of a good grammar book, your individual attention, and perhaps several referrals to a Writing Lab, such as we have at CSUF. Agreement problems usually show themselves in papers of individual students. Revising papers and experience with the English language usually cut down errors of this type significantly.

6. MISCELLANEOUS ERRORS. This category is broad and includes problems with capitalization, use of quotation marks, faulty parallel structure, etc. I aver that most of these problems stem from pure

carelessness, and you can easily detect them in the students' writing. We need to remind our students that they are making such errors when we mark their papers, and we need to remind them once again when we insist that they revise their papers for a second and a third reading.

We need to concentrate more on specific problems at determined stages in the students' education. Possibly junior high schools and middle schools should work intensively on the miscellaneous errors and subject/verb agreement. When students are in the ninth grade, the focus should be on eliminating run-on sentences and sentence fragments. Student writing should be intensified in the tenth grade as sophomores prepare for district-level writing competency exams. Teachers of sophomores should emphasize pronoun usage, and all teachers from middle school onwards should emphasize good spelling and an increased vocabulary.

At all levels the students should write, write, write so that we can correct the errors that they actually make and not waste time on discussing problems they do not have. This approach is different from the so-called traditional approach where an individual English teacher is responsible for covering everything under the sun (beginning with the eight parts of speech) in a year. This approach leads only to boredom and frustration for everyone. In some cases we may even eliminate the joy of reading and writing about what we read. If we narrowed our grammatical focus a bit at each grade level, we could more easily ensure mastery of the areas we cover. And hopefully at the junior and senior level in high school and at all levels of the college or university the students would write more competently.

And lastly, I not only urge writing as a means to detect students' errors, I also believe that much time should be spent reading literature in English classes and the literature of business in business writing classes. In order to know what good writing is, we need to read good writing. It is also fun and instructive to pay attention to writers who depart from the norm. For example, we have much to learn as we study the grammar and sentence structure of James Joyce and read the unusual business proposition of Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal.*

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